BACKING UP MANNERS!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co

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IN THE SANATORIUM!

A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

BACKING UP MANNERS!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Arthur Augustus Is Sympathetic!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY of the Fourth came slowly along the Shell passage in the School House and stopped outside Tom Merry's study door.

He raised his hand to tap on the door, then lowered it again.

There was a curious hesitation in Arthur Augustus' manner. His aristocratic face wore an expression of deep concern.

From within the study there sounded the steady tramping of feet. Someone was pacing the room with restless, tireless strides that told of a mind in trouble.

As Arthur Augustus stood hesitating outside the study door a fat junior came along the passage. It was Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

He grinned at D'Arcy's grave face.

"Going to see Tom Merry and Lowther?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"Just what I'm going to do," said Trimble, with a chuckle. "I'm going to rub it in, you know."

"What?"

"Manners is sacked!" said Trimble, with another chuckle. "Sacked, you know, for stealing! He, he! And those fellows have had the cheek to call me names—me, you know, because I don't stick to the grub rules sometimes! Cheek, you know! Now one of 'em's sacked for bagging a banknote that didn't belong to him! I'm jolly well going to rub it in, what?"

And Baggy Trimble rolled up to the door, and raised a fat paw to open it.

But Trimble's podgy fingers did not touch the door-handle.

D'Arcy's grasp fell upon his collar, and swung him away. So sudden was the swing that the fat Fourth Former spun right round D'Arcy, bumped on the opposite wall, and slid to the floor. He sat there, blinking at the swell of St. Jim's in breathless astonishment and indignation.

"Groogh! You rotter! Wharrer you up to?" gasped Trimble.

"Get away, you feahful wottah!" said Arthur Augustus, in tones of concentrated wrath. "If you do not immediately wetiah, Trimble, I shall kick you!"

"Grooh!"

"You fearful cad! To think of tauntin' poor old Tom Mewwy at a time like this!" went on Arthur Augustus, his eyes gleaming angrily at Trimble. "Not that I believe it about old Mannahs for one moment. Wun away, you beast!"

"Look here——yah!" roared Trimble.

Arthur Augustus, losing patience, commenced operations on Trimble with his boots. D'Arcy's boots were small and very elegant, but Trimble found them quite large and heavy enough.

He roared and squirmed along the passage, a rapid succession of kicks helping him towards the stairs.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Jack Blake, looking out of Study No. 6. "What's this game, Gussy?"

"Yarooh!"

"That uttah wottah was goin' to Tom Mewwy, to wub it in about Mannahs, you know!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I'm kicking him——"

"Good!" said Blake. "I'll kick him, too. Come and lend a foot or two, you chaps!"

Digby and Herries came out of No. 6 at once. Three pairs of boots were added to the application to Trimble's fat person, and Baggy rolled and squirmed along the passage with terrific yells.

Leaving the fat junior in the hands—or, rather, to the feet—of his chums, Arthur Augustus returned to Tom Merry's study.

This time he made up his mind, and tapped at the door.

There was no word from within, but the restless tramping of feet ceased. D'Arcy waited in vain, and then opened the door and looked in.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther were in the study. Manners, the third of the Terrible Three, was not there. Poor Manners was in the school sanatorium at that moment, under sentence of expulsion from St. Jim's as soon as he was well enough to go.

It was Tom Merry who had been pacing the study.

The captain of the Shell was pale and almost haggard. His handsome face was lined, his blue eyes had dark hollows under them. D'Arcy started as he saw Tom's face.

Monty Lowther was stretched in the arm-chair, his hands driven deep into his pockets, his usually genial and humorous face set in an expression of utter misery.

Arthur Augustus glanced from one to the other.

"Pway excuse my intwusion, deah boys," he said.

There was no reply.

The chums of the Shell were evidently not in a humour for a friendly call.

"I've heard about old Mannahs, Tom Mewwy. Of course, it can't be twue."

"No, it isn't!"

Tom Merry snapped out the words.

"But—but the fellows say that Mannahs himself confessed to the Head," said Arthur Augustus.

"That's true."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was dumb.

"You are sure of that, Tom Mewwy?" he asked, at length.

"Yes."

"Is Mannahs off his wockah, then?"

"I suppose so."

"I—I'm awfly sowwy, dear boys," said Arthur Augustus earnestly. "I'll cleah off, as I see you don't want to be bothahed now. I'm weally most feahfully sowwy!"

The swell of St. Jim's left the study, closing the door softly behind him. He returned with a deeply wrinkled brow to Study No. 6.

Blake and Herries and Digby were there. Trimble was somewhere downstairs groaning over his injuries.

"Well?" said the three juniors together.

"Tom Mewwy says it's twue—Mannahs confessed to the Head!" said Arthur Augustus.

"My hat!"

"But he says Mannahs didn't do it all the same, you know. That's wathah puzzlin', isn't it?"

"I can't imagine Manners boning Grundy's banknote," said Blake. "But if he didn't do it, why should he own up he did?"

"It's vewy extwaordinary."

"You fellows know what's happened?" Levison of the Fourth looked into No. 6, Cardew and Clive with him. "I don't believe it for one."

"It seems that Manners owned up to the Head," said Ralph Cardew. "Is Manners potty?"

Blake shook his head hopelessly. He was utterly perplexed.

"His minor was accused," said Sidney Clive. "Manners couldn't have been idiot enough to take it on himself to see that little beast through, could he?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Fellow wouldn't do that," said Blake, shaking his head again. "Silly idiot if he did."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but if Manners is a thief! He can't be, unless he's gone fairly off his chump!"

"All that fool Grundy's fault," growled Herries. "What does he have rotten five-pound notes for? Other fellows don't."

"There's somethin' in this I don't quite compwehend," said Arthur Augustus. "Mannahs can hardly have owned up to it unless it's twue. But—but I can't believe it, all the same. But poor old Mannahs is goin' to be sacked—he's goin' to leave St. Jim's to-mowwow. It's fwightfully wuff on his pals."

There was a dismal silence in Study No. 6 after that. Every fellow in St. Jim's who knew Manners was feeling dismayed and downhearted by the trouble that had fallen upon the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 2.
Under a Cloud!

TOM MERRY moved restlessly about the study after D'Arcy left him.

The captain of the Shell seemed unable to keep still.

Monty Lowther still sat plunged in dejection.

Tom came to a halt at last, facing his chum.

"It's all rot, Monty!" he said.

"Of course it is," muttered Lowther.

"Manners couldn't have touched that fool Grundy's banknote."

"Of course he couldn't."

"But—but he said he did——"

Lowther gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders. It was too much for him. The news of Manners' confession to the Head had come on his chums with a stunning shock.

"I've been trying to think it out," resumed Tom Merry. "I think I've got the hang of it, Monty. He's done it for his minor's sake. It was proved clear enough against young Reggie, and Manners' pater came here. We're pretty

sure he pitched into Manners, making out that it was his fault his young brother had gone to the dogs—as if Manners could help Reggie being a smoky little beast! Manners took it to heart and—and took this on himself to see Reggie clear. It was utterly idiotic, but that's the only explanation."

"I—I suppose it's possible."

"It's certain," said Tom Merry, with utter conviction in his voice.

"But—but would Manners brand himself as a thief for the sake of getting the real thief off, even when it was his own brother?"

"Manners wasn't quite himself—he's not well now," said Tom. "He acted as he did in excitement. It's pretty plain his father had been jawing him, and shoving Reggie's blame on his shoulders. We know Mr. Manners is fonder of Reggie than of poor old Harry. Parents are duffers like that sometimes. I'm sure that's how it was. And it's not going to be done! Manners isn't going to suffer for a thousand sneaking little imps like Reggie. We're going to make him take it back!"

Lowther looked hopeless.

"We've got to see him," said Tom. "He's in sanny now, utterly crocked. That shows that he wasn't quite himself yesterday, when he owned to the Head what wasn't true. We've got to see him!"

"I—I don't think he's allowed to be seen——" Lowther hesitated. "I don't think we'd be allowed, Tom——"

"Miss Marie will let us see him, if it's possible. We'll try, anyway."

"May as well try," assented Lowther.

He rose wearily from the arm-chair. The trouble that had fallen upon the Terrible Three seemed to have blotted out the sunshine of the bright summer day. Tom Merry and Lowther hardly knew how they got through lessons that day, while poor Manners lay in sanatorium. But Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, had been very easy with them.

The two juniors left the study and went towards the stairs. Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn were in a group outside their study, No. 5. The three Shell fellows looked very serious, especially George Alfred Grundy. It was his unfortunate five-pound note that was at the bottom of the trouble.

Grundy made a step forward as Tom and Lowther came by.

"I say, I'm awfully sorry about this," said Grundy awkwardly. "I—I couldn't have thought it was old Manners. I was convinced it was young Reggie. You know he was found in my study——"

"Why couldn't you take care of your confounded money?" growled Lowther.

"Well, I'm sorry," Grundy said.

"How do we know your dashed banknote was taken at all?" said Lowther savagely. "I dare say you've lost it somewhere."

"Look here——"

"You're quite fool enough!"

With that, Lowther followed his chum down the passage, leaving George Alfred Grundy very red.

"Can't mop up a chap in time of trouble," said Grundy, looking at his friends. "I suppose they're cut up, with Manners turning out like that."

"I wish you'd said nothing about your beastly banknote!" said Wilkins. "Might have kept it dark!"

"Well, I'm not saying anything more about it. Some fellows would insist on Manners handing it back, as he took it. I haven't."

"Blessed if I know how he came to do it!" said Gunn. "It's not like old Manners. Blow your banknote!"

Tom Merry and Lowther went downstairs. In the doorway of the School House Racke and Crooke and Mellish were chatting. The three cads of the School House grinned as the chums came by. The disaster that had happened to the chums of the Shell was a delight to their old enemies. Racke & Co. had never hoped for such good news as this.

Like Baggy Trimble, they had an amiable desire to rub it in.

Racke, with a wink at his comrades, went through a motion of buttoning up his pockets. Crooke and Mellish burst into a chuckle.

Smack!

Monty Lowther's arm swung up as he passed, and the back of his hand came across Aubrey Racke's face, sending the cad of the Shell spinning.

Racke gave a yell, and tumbled over in the doorway.

Lowther fixed a fierce look on his companions, but Gerald Crooke and Percy Mellish backed away promptly. They did not want any.

"You sneaking worms!" muttered Lowther. "Get up, Racke, you coward! Get up!"

Racke sat up dazedly, gritting his teeth.

But Lowther, in his present mood, did not look an easy customer to tackle, and Racke remained in a sitting posture till Monty turned away contemptuously, and followed Tom Merry down the steps into the quadrangle. Then Racke scrambled to his feet, crimson with rage.

"He, he, he!" Baggy Trimble rolled up. "Hard cheese, Racke! I say, why didn't you mop him up? He, he, he!"

Racke turned on the fat Fourth-Former savagely. He wasn't afraid of Baggy Trimble, at least. He seized Baggy by the collar, and jammed his head against the big door of the School House, till Baggy roared like a bull.

"Racke!" It was Mr. Railton's voice.

Racke released the Fourth-Former as the School House master strode upon the scene.

"How dare you treat Trimble in such a way, Racke!" exclaimed the Housemaster sternly.

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Baggy. "I—I was only remonstrating with him, sir, for chipping Tom Merry about Manners. Yow-ow-ow! I was disgusted, sir! Yow-ow——"

"So you have been twitting Manners' friends with his disgrace, Racke?" Mr. Railton's eyes gleamed.

"Manners is a thief," said Racke sullenly. "If his friends stick to him, I think they're tarred with the same brush!"

"A lad's friends may stand by him, Racke, though he may have done wrong," said the Housemaster. "I fear you have a mean nature, Racke, and you are certainly a bully. You will follow me to my study!"

There was a sound of swishing in the Housemaster's study a few minutes later. Then Mr. Railton pointed to the door with his cane.

"You may go, Racke. If I hear that you have uttered a single word of insult to Manners' friends again, I shall punish you more severely. You should show some consideration to persons in distress."

And Racke left the study, squeezing his hands under his arms, with a face like a demon.

CHAPTER 3.
Innocent or Guilty?

"CAN I do anything for you?"

Miss Marie spoke in soft, kind tones.

Manners of the Shell lay in bed in the cool, airy ward. The girl was seated by the bedside, knitting.

Manners was silent. Occasionally he moved a little, and once or twice a sigh broke from him. But he did not speak.

The Shell fellow was looking pale and ill.

The fact that he was under sentence of expulsion from the school was sufficient to account for the nervous shock he had sustained. The school doctor had declared that in a short time he would be well enough to travel. Then he was to leave the school for ever. To a proud, sensitive fellow like Manners of the Shell, the shock was terrible enough. To know that he was regarded with pitying contempt by all the fellows he had known, that was a hard punishment for the unhappy junior, even if he had sinned.

Was Manners guilty?

Miss Marie had wondered. There was his own confession of guilt—made to Dr. Holmes himself. But the "Little Sister" knew the Terrible Three well, and Manners' guilt seemed to her almost impossible. She had not spoken on the subject, neither had he. Since he had been brought into the ward the previous day, Manners had spoken no word.

He seemed like a fellow stunned.

But he spoke now, as the girl's kind eyes glanced towards him.

"I want to get away, Miss Marie."

"As soon as you are well," said the girl softly.

Manners made a restless movement.

"I'm all right. I don't know why I came over queer yesterday. I'm not ill—only I feel rather queer. I—I want to get away from St. Jim's. I can't stand it! Tell the doctor I want to get away to-day!"

Miss Marie shook her head.

"Not to-day," she said. "To-morrow, perhaps. Would you like your friends to come in and speak to you? The doctor has given permission."

Manners' cheeks burned.

"No, no! I—I can't see them! I—want to get away quietly before they can see me again! No, no!"

He was silent again, his face turned away from the Little Sister. Marie went on quietly with her knitting.

But Manners turned to her again at last.

"I—I think I'd like to see Tom and Monty," he muttered. "I ought to say good-bye to them. I'd like to, if—if they care to speak to me, after—after what's happened!"

"They are crossing the garden now," said Marie, with a nod towards the big window. "Shall I call them in?"

Manners drew a quick breath.

"Yes, please."

The girl rose quietly and left the ward. Manners groaned as he laid his head on the pillow again. He was feeling weak as water; he hardly knew why. He was strong and fit enough, as a rule. The terrible stress of mind he had been through, since his minor had been accused and condemned, had told upon him; and that last scene had been the finish. He could still see the Head's stern, grim face as he made his confession, just in time to save his minor from being expelled. He could still hear the bitter words his father had uttered.

There were footsteps in the ward.

Tom Merry and Lowther stood by his bedside.

"Manners, old man!" said Tom huskily.

"Old chap!" muttered Lowther.

Manners eyed them, the colour creeping into his pale face.

"Tom!" he muttered. "Monty! So you've come to see me, although——"

He broke off.

"We wanted to see you before, but we couldn't," said Tom. "Manners, don't be ass enough to think that we believe it

for a minute! We know you didn't touch Grundy's banknote."

"I confessed to the Head."

"You told him a lie, Manners!"

Manners was silent.

"I've figured out exactly what happened," went on Tom Merry. "Reggie was caught in Grundy's study, fooling with the table-drawer, where that silly idiot kept his banknote. The banknote was missed. Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn all knew that Reggie had taken it. You knew he had——"

"I—I——"

"Your father came down to take him away," said Tom. "I could see in his face that he was going to slang you—to blame you for what Reggie had done. I know you had a scene with him in the study. Didn't you?"

Manners' features worked.

"The—the pater was fearfully cut up, Tom," he whispered. "You don't know what he thinks of Reggie. It fairly knocked him over—Reggie expelled from the school for stealing. It—it might have been a death-blow to him, Tom; he looked so old and white, it made my heart ache. I—I know he wouldn't feel it so much if it was me."

There was no hint of bitterness in Manners' tone. The unjust preference of the father for the younger son had sometimes wounded him, but he was past that now. Through it all he had only been thinking of his father, to whom the reckless lag's disgrace had been so terrible a blow.

"I knew it!" said Tom. "And then you made up your mind, like a silly chump, to take it on yourself and see Reggie through."

Manners was silent.

"You'd not have done it if you'd been in your real senses," said Tom steadily. "It was wrong to do it, Manners. What you said to the Head was false. You've got to tell him the truth now, Manners!"

"You must!" said Lowther.

"What I've said, I've said! Let that drop, Tom! You can think what you like. I—I'd rather you didn't think of me as a thief, if you come to that!" Manners' lips quivered. "But—but there's no undoing it! I'm going, Tom!"

"You're not going!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "You're not going to sacrifice yourself to save that young rascal. I won't let you!"

"There's nothing to be done, Tom!"

"You've got to tell the Head exactly how the matter stands."

"I've said all I've got to say to the Head."

"Then I'll do it for you!"

Manners started.

"Tom, you're not to interfere! I—I tell you, it's relieved the pater no end to find that it—it wasn't Reggie. He can stand it so long as it's me. Don't you interfere, Tom! You'll only make matters worse."

"I'm not going to let the innocent suffer for the guilty when I know the truth!" said Tom savagely.

"Tom!"—Manners' face was white and scared—"you're not to interfere! Look here! It—it's all right! I—I did it!"

"What?"

"I—I was hard up, you know!" The words seemed torn from Manners' pale lips. "I—I knew Grundy had that banknote, and—and I went to his study. It's exactly as I told the Head, Tom!"

His voice faltered under Tom Merry's steady glance. Tom's troubled face broke into a faint smile.

"You're not up to much as a liar, Manners, old chap," he said softly. "It's not in your line, and you can't do it!"

"I tell you, Tom——"

Miss Märie quietly interposed.

"He must not be excited!" she whispered.

"Good-bye, Manners, old chap!" said Tom Merry, taking his chum's hand. "We've got to clear. We'll look in again when we can."

"Keep your pecker up!" said Lowther.

And they left the ward, Manners' eyes following them with a haggard look.

In the garden without, Tom Merry halted, his hands clenched hard.

"You see how it is, Monty," he muttered. "I was right! Manners told a lie to save that young scapegrace Reggie because his father's more cut up about Reggie than about Manners, who's worth a thousand of the smoky little beast! Manner's pater had ragged him, of course, putting it all down to his neglecting Reggie here. And we know he didn't neglect him. Manners was fairly driven into this; and even now he's going to keep it up if he can. But we're not going to let him, Monty!"

"No fear!" said Monty Lowther, setting his teeth. "He's not going to suffer for his minor. Hang his minor!"

"We've got to see that the facts come out," said Tom. "It was Manners minor right enough, and he's skulking behind his brother to get off scot-free. We're going to stop it!"

"How, Tom? Manners is sticking to his yarn."

"Reggie must have a rag of decency about him somewhere, as he's Manners' brother. Manners owned up to a lie for his sake. Why shouldn't he own up to the truth for old Manners' sake?"

Lowther looked hopeless.

"He won't, Tom!"

"He may be made to. Come on!"

Tom Merry's brow was grim and hard as he led the way back to the School House. The captain of the Shell was certain that he had found out the truth; and he was determined that, somehow, all St. Jim's should find it out, too, and his chum's name should be cleared.

CHAPTER 4.

Baggy Trimble is Anxious.

"I SAY, Grundy!"

Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn were at tea in their study, when Baggy Trimble inserted his face in the doorway.

The three Shell fellows were not looking cheerful, for a variety of reasons.

The affair of Manners troubled and depressed them, for one thing. And then the loss of Grundy's banknote was another trouble. Grundy & Co. were stony; and that handsome tip from Uncle Grundy had been intended to relieve the financial situation in No. 3 Study. But it was gone from their gaze like a beautiful dream, and it left them broke.

Tips could not be expended upon study spreads as in the old days before the "grub rules." But with plenty of that necessary article, cash, it was possible to eke out the war fare. There were still some articles of diet upon which the eagle eye of the Food Controller had not fallen. As Gunn said hungrily:

"A dozen or so new-laid eggs would make all the difference at tea, even if you had only two slices of bread, and no sugar at all. And eggs, at least, were plentiful, if a chap had only the necessary cash."

Grundy & Co. were consequently not in a happy mood, and they scowled at Baggy Trimble with great unanimity.

"Get out!" growled Grundy.

"Buzz off, podgy-face!" snapped Wilkins.

Gunn did not speak, but he reached for a cushion.

"Look here, you know!" said Baggy, keeping a wary eye on the cushion. "It's about your banknote, Grundy!"

"Oh, rats! Get out!"

"But, I say, have you had it back from Manners?" persisted Trimble.

"No!" roared Grundy.

"Ain't you going to get it back?"

"No, hang you!"

"But, I—I say——" Trimble dodged as the cushion flew, and it passed him and landed in the passage. "Don't be a beast, Grundy old fellow! Look here, Grundy, if Manners won't give up the banknote, his father could be made to refund it, as he stole it. Don't you know that?"

"I'm not going to mention the matter," said Grundy. "Hang the banknote! I wish my uncle had never sent it to me. Get out! It isn't your business, anyway."

"But I say, you can't lose it like that," urged Trimble. "Manners must have it about him somewhere, as he hasn't been out of the school since it was stolen. He can't be allowed to take it away from St. Jim's with him! Why, that's rewarding him for stealing it, you know."

"Dash it all, there's something in that!" said Gunn, struck by Baggy's argument. "I don't see that we're—ahem—I mean that you are called upon to lose the fiver entirely, Grundy."

"Just what I say," said Baggy, encouraged. "It's truckling to dishonesty, you know."

Grundy snorted.

"I'm not going to say a word," he said obstinately. "And if you don't get out of this study, Trimble, I'll take a stump to you!"

"But look here, you know——"

Grundy jumped up and made a dive for his cricket bat in the corner. Trimble made a dive for the passage at the same moment.

The cricket bat lunged behind as he fled, and Trimble disappeared with a wild war-whoop.

Grundy slammed the door after him, and returned to his seat with a puckered brow.

"I suppose you fellows think I'm an ass for letting the fiver go like that?" he snapped.

"Well, fivers don't grow on every bush," said Wilkins. "It would come in jolly handy, if you got it back."

"I think so!" assented Gunn.

"I can't!" said Grundy. "There's no doubt Manners took it, as he says he did. But we know Manners—a chap straight as a die. He must have been in some fearful fix for money, to steal my banknote."

"I suppose he was. But——"

"Well, I'm going to give it to him," said Grundy. "I'm going to see him before he leaves here, and tell him he can keep it. Then he won't be a thief, see?"

"My hat!"

Wilkins and Gunn stared blankly at their study-leader. Grundy's powerful brain had apparently been at work on this matter, thinking it out.

"Of course, I'm as down on thieving as anybody," continued Grundy. "A thief's about the meanest kind of a polecat there is, after the Kaiser. But I don't believe Manners really knew what he was doing. I think he must have been so worried for money that it made him simply potty. That's the only way I can account for a chap like Manners stealing. So—so if he wants my fiver so jolly badly, he can have it. He's gone through enough for it, poor beast!"

"You ain't a bad sort, Grundy," said Wilkins admiringly. "You're a thundering ass, but you ain't a bad sort."

"Oh, rats!" growled Grundy.

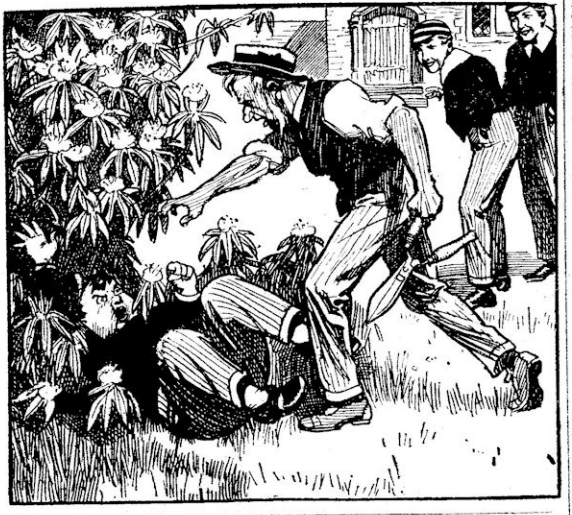
"Mr. Manners may send it to you," said Gunn reflectively. "He was too upset to think of it when he was here. But he's bound to think of it later."

"Oh, blow Mr. Manners! Blow the fiver!"

And the subject dropped in Grundy's study.

But it did not drop with Baggy Trimble. Baggy, as usual, was hard up; and Baggy had many a deep scheme for dodging the food regulations, if only he had the necessary cash in hand. The thought of the fiver haunted Trimble. If Grundy didn't want it, Baggy did; and why shouldn't he have it? Better than letting a thief keep it! Baggy quite thrilled with indignation at the immorality of allowing a thief to keep his plunder.

"By gad!" murmured Baggy, as he rolled out into the quad thinking it over. "I'll go and see Manners, and call halves! He's still got it somewhere, and if he won't go halves I'll tell the Head! I can't let him get off from the school with it—that would be wrong."



Baggy in Trouble.
(See Chapter 4.)

Baggy Trimble started for the sanatorium, in the hope of being admitted to see Manners. He met Tom Merry and Lowther coming away, through the garden.

"Seen Manners?" asked Trimble, halting.

"Yes," said Tom, shortly.

"Hold on," said Baggy, catching at his sleeve. "I've come to see Manners, but they may not let me see him. He mayn't want to see me——"

"Why should he, you fat idiot? Of course he won't."

"Then you can take in a message for me, as you seem to have the run of the place," said Baggy eagerly.

"What message can you possibly want to send to Manners?" demanded Tom.

"About the banknote, you know."

"The what?"

"Grundy's banknote!"

Tom Merry stared at him.

"You see, Manners has still got it," Baggy rattled on cheerfully. "Grundy isn't going to make a fuss about it—silly ass! I don't think Manners ought to be allowed to take it away from St. Jim's with him—stolen property, you know. I want to ask Manners about it. I'm willing to go halves——"

"What?" roared Tom.

"I—I mean, I—I want to take it back to Grundy, of course——"

Before Baggy could finish, he was rolling among the Head's rhododendrons. Tom Merry and Lowther went on, and Baggy sat up and blinked after them, in the midst of the shrubbery. He was still there, trying to recover breath, when the gardener came along. The Head's gardener stared at him almost speechless with indignation. Baggy had not improved the shrubs.

"Out of that!" roared the gardener.

"Grooh! I say—yaroooh!"

A heavy boot helped Baggy out of the shrubbery. He bolted for the quad, quite giving up the idea of interviewing Manners. He did not like heavy boots at all.

Tom Merry and Lowther went on to the School House. There was a new expression on Tom's face. In the stress of what had happened, Tom had not given a thought to Grundy's missing fiver. But he thought of it now.

"That banknote is still somewhere, Monty," he said, in a low voice. "We know Manners never touched it, though he pretended he did, to clear Reggie. That banknote can be found—and that will knock Manners' yarn into a cocked hat, whether he likes it or not."

"But where are you going to look for it, Tom?"

"On the thief," said Tom Merry grimly.

"You mean——"

"Manners minor. Come on!"

And the chums of the Shell entered the School House. Baggy Trimble, quite without intending it, had given a new hope to Manners' chums.

CHAPTER 5.
Reggie's Reply.

"WELL, it served you right, you know!" remarked D'Arcy minor of the Third Form.

"You asked for it, you know," said Jameson.

"And you'll get over it," said Levison minor. "Buck up!"

The Third Formers were gathered in the Form-room round Reggie Manners, who was leaning against a desk, with a red and sullen face.

Manners minor had been flogged in the Head's study that morning, and he did not seem to have got over it yet. Dr. Holmes had not spared the rod.

But the fags considered that Reggie Manners had got off very cheaply, considering everything.

He had been accused of stealing Grundy's banknote, and in the course of the inquiry it had transpired that Reggie had made disreputable acquaintances outside the school, that he had gone down to the Green Man public-house to play billiards with Mr. Lodgey, and that he owed that enterprising gentleman money. His major's confession had saved him from the charge of theft, but the other circumstances remained. And for his exploits as a merry blade Reggie had been soundly flogged.

Reggie had been in disgrace in his Form for some time. Wally & Co. did not approve of merry blades. D'Arcy minor and his friends had sent the young rascal to Coventry. But now that it had all come out and he had been severely punished for his sins, the fags graciously rescinded that sentence, and did their best to comfort him

As their consolations chiefly took the form of saying that it served him right, and that he had asked for it, Reggie found them wearisome.

But he was glad to be on the old terms with Wally D'Arcy and the rest. It was a relief to get out of Coventry. And the late happenings had rather sickened Reggie of his role as a merry blade.

It might be no end doggish to drop in at a pub to play billiards, but it could not be called doggish to squirm on Taggles' broad back under the Head's birch. The gilt had been rubbed off the gingerbread, so to speak. Billiards at the Green Man had lost their fascination for the youthful imitator of Racke & Co.

Wally, charitably hoping that the lesson had done Reggie good, was graciously willing to restore him to the honours of his friendship.

Reggie listened sullenly to his friends' consolations. The knowledge that he had asked for it did not seem to make the flogging more palatable, somehow.

"You see," continued Wally judicially, "it's really the best thing that could have happened to you. If you'd kept on as you started, you'd have been cut by every decent fellow in the Form, and you'd have ended in the long run the same as your major."

"Let my major alone!" grunted Reggie.

"Wouldn't touch him with a bargepole," said Wally. "I'm not going to allow anybody in the Third to chip you about that, Reggie. 'Tain't your fault if your brother pinches fellows' banknotes. It was decent of your major, in a way, to own up, when you were going to be sacked for it. Still, the sooner he goes, the better. You bear it in mind, and make up your mind to run straight in future, and we'll help you. Next time I see you with a cigarette, f'instance, I'm jam your head against the wall as hard as I can. I can't say fairer than that."

"So will I!" said Joe Frayne.

"Same here!" said Jameson heartily.

"We all will!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Levison minor.

Reggie scowled at his kind friends, apparently still ungrateful.

"If we see you making for the Green Man any time we'll come after you and duck you in the horse-trough!" went on Wally. "I wish we'd done that before. Might have saved you this whopping. Still, I've no doubt at all that it will do you good, Reggie. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Oh, dry up!"

"What?"

"Dry up, and give a fellow a rest!"

"I won't lick you, Manners minor, as the Head's done it," said Wally magnanimously, "but don't you be cheeky!"

"Pr-r-r-r!"

"Leave him to get over it," suggested Hobbs. "Let's go down to cricket!"

"Good idea!"

Wally & Co., leaving Manners minor to get over it, left the Form-room. They met Tom Merry and Lowther at the door.

"Manners minor here?" asked Tom.

Wally jerked his thumb into the Form-room.

"There he is!"

The fags went their way, and the two Shell fellows came in. Reggie looked at them sullenly. Tom closed the Form-room door.

"I want a little jaw with you, Reggie," he said quietly.

"I don't feel inclined to jaw," said Reggie sullenly.

"That doesn't make any difference. You've been flogged, it seems?"

"Yes."

"If you'd been in a higher Form you'd most likely have been sacked," said Tom. "You can be glad it's no worse."

Reggie grunted.

"We want to know the truth about Grundy's banknote," said Tom. "We've just seen your major in sanny. He's keeping it up that he took Grundy's fiver."

The fag stared at him.

"Keeping it up?" he repeated. "What do you mean? You know he took it!"

"He didn't take it!" said Tom, between his teeth.

"He told the Head he did."

"You know why he did that, Reggie!"

"Of course I do. He was going to keep it dark," said Reggie bitterly; "but after the pater got at him, he hadn't the nerve to let me be sacked for what he'd done. So he owned up!"

Tom Merry looked hard at the fag.

The sullen resentment in Reggie's face was no pretence. Unless he was an uncommonly clever actor, he was speaking as he thought. He believed that his brother's confession was genuine—that Manners was guilty.

Tom was staggered. He had had no doubt that Reggie was the guilty party, and that, with his usual selfishness, he was allowing his brother to suffer in his stead.

Monty Lowther broke in angrily.

"Don't give us that rot, Manners minor! You've still got the banknote somewhere, and you've got to produce it and own up!"

"You're potty!" said Reggie, staring at him. "Hasn't Harry owned up to it, you silly fool!"

"What he told the Head wasn't the truth," said Tom Merry quietly. "Manners owned up to it—to save you! He's sacrificing himself to save you from being expelled!"

"Oh, don't talk rot!"

"You can't let him do it, Reggie! You know he's innocent, and you know that you're guilty. You can't let your brother stand the racket for you."

Reggie's face flamed.

"You rotter!" he shouted shrilly. "You'd like to fix it on me; to get your pal out of a scrape, would you? Well, you can't do it. Harry's owned up, and you can't get away from that. Do you think he'd own up if it wasn't true?"

"I know he did!"

"So you think I had the banknote after all?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, you rotter!" panted Reggie. "You cad!"

Tom Merry did not heed those epithets. He looked at the fag utterly at a loss. Reggie's angry indignation could hardly be counterfeited. It was borne in upon Tom's mind that he was not guilty. But if Reggie was not guilty, who was? Had Manners, after all, been speaking the truth to the Head?

"You'd do anything to get my brother cleared," went on Reggie, his voice rising. "You don't care whether he's a thief or not! You don't care for me. You'd like to fix it on me, though you know he did it. Now you're going to pretend that Harry's owned up, though he knew I did it. I can see your little game, and I'll stop you, too!"

He ran towards the door.

"Reggie! Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Mr. Railton! I'll ask him whether you're going to be allowed to call me a thief!"

"Reggie!"

The fag did not heed.

He tore open the door, and dashed into the passage. His footsteps died away.

Tom Merry and Lowther looked at one another blankly.

"Well, my hat!" said Lowther, at last. "Has he really gone to the Housemaster, Tom?"

"If he hasn't, he's bluffing, and he's guilty," said Tom.

"But if he has——"

"Blessed if I know what to think!"

Tom Merry knitted his brows. He felt utterly at sea. There was a step in the passage, and Kildare of the Sixth looked in.

"Mr. Railton wants you two in his study," he said.

"Yes, Kildare."

The two Shell fellows, amazed and dismayed, made their way to the School House master's study. They simply did not know what to think of this new development.

CHAPTER 6.
In Dark Doubt.

MR. RAILTON received the two juniors with a stern brow. Reggie Manners was in the study, his face crimson and his eyes glinting. The fag had carried out his threat. It was a natural enough step if he was innocent. He had a right to appeal to his Housemaster for protection. But if he was guilty, it was inconceivable that he should possess the nerve and effrontery to take such a step.

"Merry! Lowther!" The Housemaster's voice was severe. "Manners minor has told me that you have made a serious accusation against him, and he has demanded my protection. Is it possible that you have accused him of committing the theft for which his brother is now under sentence of expulsion?"

Tom Merry faced the School House master steadily.

"Yes, sir!" he said firmly.

"You cannot believe this Merry?"

"I don't see anything else to believe, sir. Manners major never touched Grundy's banknote!"

"Merry!"

"He never did, sir," said Monty Lowther. "It's impossible."

"How is it impossible, Lowther?"

"Because it—it is, sir," said Lowther, stammering a little. "Manners couldn't be a thief! It's all rot, sir!"

"That is nonsense, Lowther! I certainly could not have suspected Manners of such an act; but he is condemned on his own confession of guilt."

"That wasn't true, sir," said Tom.

"Are you in your senses, Merry?" exclaimed Mr. Railton sharply. "Do you wish me to believe that a boy would confess to a disgraceful crime, entailing the most severe consequences, if he had not committed it?"

"Manners did, sir. He did it to save his brother!" Tom Merry's voice did not falter. "His father reproached him with having let Reggie go to the bad—though it wasn't Manners' fault. Poor old Manners was cornered, and he did that silly thing to save his brother from being sacked. There wasn't a word of truth in his confession to the Head!"

"Has Manners told you so?"

"No, sir."

"Then what reason have you for supposing so?"

"I know it's true, sir."

"You cannot know it is true, Merry! I respect you for your faith in your friend, but you are doing great wrong to an innocent boy in carrying it to this length. Manners minor is wholly cleared by his brother's confession, and it is simply infamous to make an attempt to shift the odium upon him again. I am sure you do not realise the seriousness of your action, Merry; but there must be no repetition of it. If you breathe one word again, associating Manners minor with the theft in Grundy's study, it will be my duty to report your conduct to the Head for the severest punishment."

Tom Merry's face was crimson.

"I—I don't say Manners minor did it, sir," he said. "I only say that Manners major did not. I—I rather think now that Reggie didn't do it."

"Thank you for nothing!" sneered Reggie.

"Silence, Manners minor! If you admit, Merry, that Manners minor was not guilty, as you must, you must see that Manners major's confession was genuine, and that he stated the facts to Dr. Holmes."

"He did not, sir."

"Then you would imply that there is some third party involved in the case, who stole the banknote?"

"I—I suppose so, sir!" stammered Tom. He had not realised, for the moment, that that supposition was involved in what he had said.

"This is merely childish, Merry! You would scatter accusations broadcast among your schoolfellows, apparently, rather than believe Manners on his own confession."

Tom Merry was silent.

Put like that, it was enough to silence him. But in his heart his faith in his chum never wavered.

"I understand fully that Manners' disgrace is a heavy blow to you," said Mr. Railton, more kindly. "I understand that you seek to cling to your faith in him. Do so by all means. But you must not allow that to make you unjust to others. I require a promise from both of you that you will not utter one word connecting Manners minor with the theft."

There was silence in the study.

"Unless you make that promise, I must refer the matter to Dr. Holmes," added the Housemaster. "But I trust that I can rely upon your good sense and your good feeling to do what is right."

"Very well, sir," said Tom, at last;

"I promise. I don't think Manners minor did it—now."

"I promise, sir," said Lowther quietly.

"Very well. You may go."

The Shell fellows left the study. Reggie Manners followed them out, and after the Housemaster's door had closed he gave them a bitter, sneering look.

"I've jolly well put the stopper on that!" he said. "I knew you wouldn't dare to keep it up to Railton."

Tom's lip curled.

"I should have kept it up to Railton if I'd still believed it," he said. "I don't believe you were the thief now, Reggie. It was your own fault I thought so at all, for being a little gambling blackguard. I think now that you did not do it; and I know your brother didn't!"

"What silly rot! Who did, then?"

"I don't know."

"You're going to accuse somebody else next?" sneered Reggie. "D'Arcy, perhaps, or Blake, or Levison, or Talbot——"

"Hold your tongue, you little fool!"

"Well, you'll have to accuse somebody!" said Reggie jeeringly. "It's you that's the fool. If Harry didn't do it, why should he say he did?"

"It was to save you, you ungrateful young rotter!" said Monty Lowther savagely.

"Oh, don't pile on the agony!" said Reggie. "Harry doesn't think all that of me, any more than I do of him. Catch him getting sacked to save my neck, if he wasn't guilty! Do you think I'd do it for him?"

"I know you wouldn't! But he did it for you."

"Oh, rats!"

And with that scornful retort, Reggie Manners stalked away.

The chums of the Shell moved away slowly. They had started upon this investigation with the hope of clearing Manners. They had succeeded, so far, in convincing themselves that Reggie was innocent, which fastened the black stain of guilt all the more hopelessly upon their chum.

"It was somebody else," said Tom, at last.

Lowther looked hopeless.

"Who, Tom?"

"I don't know," said Tom Merry desperately. "Trimble, perhaps; he's a dishonest little beast!"

Monty Lowther's face became very grave.

"Draw a line, Tom, old chap! One can't say things like that."

"How do we know Grundy had a banknote at all?" said Tom. "How do we know for certain there was any theft?"

"Go easy, old chap! There were half a dozen witnesses who knew Grundy had a fiver—and Grundy isn't a liar, either."

Tom Merry clenched his teeth. He needed Lowther's warning; his mind was all at sea, and he was almost in despair. But it would not do—it was not right—to indulge in wild and reckless suspicions. But in the midst of doubt and dismay, there was one illuminating thought—which he owed to Baggy Trimble.

"The banknote, Monty—it must be somewhere! Manners never had it, and—and it's pretty clear now that Reggie never had it. Who had it, then? If we can get on the track of the banknote——"

"We'll try!" said Lowther hopefully.

The chums of the Shell returned to their study. There was a cricket-match due on the morrow with Rylcombe Grammar School, and they ought to have been at cricket practice. But even cricket had vanished from Tom Merry's mind now; he had totally forgotten the Grammar School match. While his chum was in danger, there was only one thought in his mind—to save Manners. If only—only he could have made others feel and share the loyal faith in his own breast! But he could not. How was he to save Manners?

The two juniors entered the study, and Tom Merry's brow darkened. Ralph Cardew, of the Fourth, was there, sitting carelessly on the corner of the table, smoking a cigarette.

CHAPTER 7.
Cardew Takes a Hand.

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW removed the cigarette from his lips, and nodded coolly to the Shell fellows.

"I've been waitin' for you," he remarked.

"You needn't have troubled," growled Monty Lowther. "And if you don't chuck that cigarette out of the study, I'll chuck you out!"

Cardew laughed.

"Sorry! I forgot the high moral atmosphere of this study," he said. "I apologise; I withdraw the cigarette." He threw it into the fender, and crushed it under his elegant boot. "There!"

"Now get out!" grunted Lowther. He was in no mood for company, least of all that of the cool, cynical dandy of the Fourth.

"I came here to speak to you fellows."

"Well, what is it?" said Tom Merry shortly.

"About Manners."

Tom flushed.

"You needn't speak to us about Manners!" he exclaimed. "We're not going to discuss him with you."

"Don't fly out at a chap before you know what he's drivin' at," said Cardew, unmoved. "I should think you'd find it grateful and comfortin' to know that somebody beside yourself believes in him."

"You believe in him?" asked Tom, taken aback.

"Exactly!"

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"You see, I've found Manners and his cheery minor rather an entertainin' study," explained Cardew. "If I'd been Manners, I'd either have wrung the merry Reggie's neck, or allowed him to go to the dogs his own way. The way Manners bothered himself about that young rascal was an entertainin' spectacle to me. I found it highly amusin'."

"Look here——"

"Let a fellow finish!" pleaded Cardew. "How you do fly out! Havin' observed the manners and customs—no pun intended—of the Manners family, I haven't the slightest doubt that your duffer of a pal has been goin' to work on the self-sacrificin' stunt. I think he is that kind of an ass. I don't believe he even heard of Grundy's blessed fiver till his minor was accused of stealin' it, an' he owned up to borrowin' it himself, because he was a howlin' ass, not because he was an amateur burglar. Cheery old Cain said he wasn't his brother's keeper, but Cain hadn't had the advantage of livin' in the highly moral atmosphere of this study. Manners had, you know. And my fixed opinion is that when that high-browed old gent, his pater, came down and cut up rusty, Manners went the whole hog, an' took it on himself to see his minor through. How does that strike you?"

"We both think so already," said Tom.

"Then we're gettin' on. I've been givin' this matter some steady thinkin'," explained Cardew. "Chap must think of somethin', now they've stopped racin' an' geegees are off. I don't see why Manners shouldn't be cleared, an' I've got an idea."

Tom Merry and Lowther regarded the dandy of the Fourth doubtfully.

Cardew's light, ironical tone irritated them in their mood of anxiety. But they knew Cardew had all his wits about him, and was as keen as a razor. If it was possible that he had hit upon some point that had escaped them——

"It was good of Manners to stick up for his minor like that," continued Cardew. "But I suppose you fellows don't want it, what? You'd rather see him cleared, even if he slangs you in return?"

"Yes, of course."

"St. Jim's won't miss the merry Reggie, if he's kicked out, I'm sure. Perhaps, too, he will be safer under the parental eye," added Cardew.

"You think it was Reggie?"

"Don't you?"

"I don't know—I think not. It wasn't Manners, anyway."

"Anyhow, you want to get it taken off Manners, whether it drops on his minor again or not?"

"Of course."

"That's what I'm getting at. Now, Grundy's banknote was pinched from his table-drawer on Wednesday afternoon. Reggie had been there ragging the study, on account of Grundy bothering him—so he said. Reggie went, and the fiver went at the same time. Now, on Wednesday afternoon you fellows were playin' cricket."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Lots. You played the New House, and Manners was in the School House team. He doesn't usually play for the House, but he did that time."

"That's so."

"Now, you three chaps are generally inseparable," said Cardew. "When a fellow sights Lowther's cheery visage, f'rinstance, he's bound to sight yours the next minute, and Manners' the minute after. You always go round in a batch."

"What are you driving at?" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently.

"An alibi, dear boy!"

"An—an alibi?"

"Exactly. Legal expression meaning that you weren't on the spot and can prove it."

"I know what an alibi is, you ass!"

"Quite so. Well, take me as a lawyer examinin' you, and see whether you can scare up an alibi for old Manners. What did you do with him after the cricket match on Wednesday?"

Tom Merry started.

"My hat! We went to the tuck-shop," he said. "After that we were in the quad for a bit, and then we came up to the study."

"Manners with you all the time?"

"Yes—the three of us."

"And in the study. Manners leave you at all?"

"No. We left him when his minor came in to speak to him. Reggie wanted to speak to him alone."

"After the dear boy's adventures at the Green Man!" smiled Cardew. "You left Manners major and minor in this study?"

"Yes."

"After that?"

"We hung about the passage till there was a row about Reggie being in Grundy's study. Then we came along the stairs, and Manners came along from this study."

Cardew smiled.

"After visitin' his major here, Reggie went to Grundy's quarters, leavin' old Manners in this study?"

"Yes."

"And after Wilkins had kicked Reggie out, Manners came on the scene at the same time as you and Lowther?"

"Yes."

"Then, dear boys, unless Henry

Manners, Esquire, has the wonderful gift of bein' in two places at once, he couldn't have gone into Grundy's study and pinched his banknote, and he's talking like a merry Prussian when he says he did!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Lowther. "And—and we never thought of that, Tom!"

Tom Merry was silent, his face quite pale.

Manners' own confession of the theft had prevented any thought of an alibi being entertained. To prove an alibi for Manners, against Manners' own wish, was a curious idea—just the kind of idea that would enter the whimsical brain of Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"I think it's made out." Cardew tapped on his knee, tapping off the points of the argument as he enumerated them. "First, Grundy had the banknote with him in his pocket till life came in, after the House match was over. He put it in the drawer of his study table when he went up to the dorm to change. After that, it was taken. Wilkins found Reggie messing about the study, and kicked him out, and then the banknote was missed. Manners says he sneaked in and took it. Well, how could he? You two fellows were with him till his minor came. His minor went straight from this study to Grundy's—his major didn't go with him. The merry minor was found there, and the fiver missed. Unless Manners went to Grundy's study with his minor and stole the fiver under Reggie's nose, he didn't go there at all. We know he didn't do that. Ergo—Latin, dear boys—ergo, Manners didn't go into Grundy's study at all, Ergo encore, he couldn't have taken the banknote, and he's departin' from veracity when he says he did. What?"

"It's as clear as daylight," said Tom Merry, his lips quivering. "I—I hadn't thought it out like that, Cardew. I don't know how to thank you for pointing it out to me!"

Cardew slipped off the table, with a yarn.

"I've found it amusin' to think it out. You're welcome to the result of my brainy cogitations. Ta-ta, old scout—I'm goin' to seek a less holy atmosphere where I can get a smoke."

And the dandy of the Fourth lounged out of the study.

"Tom!" Monty Lowther's voice was husky. "Tom! I knew it wasn't Manners; and now it's proved that it couldn't have been! Except when Reggie was with him in this study he was under our eyes all the time."

Tom Merry's eyes glistened.

"Come on, Monty! We're going to the Head!"

And the two Shell fellows, their hearts lightened by the result of Ralph Reckness Cardew's brainy cogitations, hurried away to Dr. Holmes's study.

CHAPTER 8.
Baggy's Awful Fix.

"GUSSY, old man——"

Baggy Trimble's affectionate address was cut short by a cold and freezing stare from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Did you addwess me, Twimble?" asked the swell of St. Jim's, in his most stately manner.

"Yes, old fellow——"

"I should be sowwy to kick you again, Twimble, aftah kickin' you alweady this aftahnoon. But if you address me as Gussy, I shall have no wesource——"

"Look here——"

"No wesource but to bestow anothah kickin' on you, Twimble!"

"Oh, come off it!" said Trimble, apparently not abashed by Gussy's lofty stateliness. "You've been hanging about the passage here some time, haven't you——"

"I have been wegardin' the sunset fwom the window, Twimble. I have not been hangin' about."

"Well, have you seen Grundy?"

"Gwundy has gone out."

"And his pals——"

"Wilkins and Gunn were with him. I wathah think they have gone down to the gym, if you want them!"

"Oh, good!"

Arthur Augustus turned his noble back on Baggy Trimble, and continued to regard the sunset over the old elms from the corridor window. Trimble rolled away up the passage, having ascertained that Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn were not in their quarters.

The fat Fourth Former cautiously opened Grundy's door, and slipped into the study. He closed the door after him.

"Oh, the rotters!" murmured Baggy, as he tried the door of the study cupboard.

The cupboard was locked.

"Suspicious cads! I suppose they thought somebody might be after their grub!" said Baggy, with scornful contempt.

As Baggy Trimble had come there after Grundy's grub, this was rather cool.

Grundy's study was generally better supplied than the others. Grundy's ample cash compensated to some extent for troublesome regulations. Just at present it was a desert, owing to the loss of the fiver; but Baggy was not aware of that fact. Baggy was hungry, having had his tea as much as half-an-hour ago. And a dozen times at least he had obtained surreptitious supplies in Grundy's study.

Baggy surveyed the locked cupboard wrathfully. The fact that it was locked made him all the more certain that eatables were there.

"Chap couldn't break the lock," he murmured. "But the door might come open if—if I shoved a chisel or something in. Grundy would only think it was Manners minor at his tricks again."

Baggy hesitated a few moments; but he thought of possible supplies—new-laid eggs, tins of sardines, tins of pineapple—which were very likely hidden behind that locked door.

He had raided such things before. He made up his mind at last, and looked round for a weapon. He found a screwdriver which belonged to Wilkins' toolbox, and started operations on the cupboard.

He succeeded in forcing the screwdriver in, and there was a loud snap as he tried to force the door open. The screwdriver had snapped in two!

"Oh, crumbs!" mumbled Baggy, in dismay. "Wilkins will make a fuss about that! I hope he'll think it was Manners minor! Oh, crikey!"

He spun round as the study door opened, the broken screwdriver in his fat hand.

Fortunately for Baggy Trimble it was not Grundy who looked in.

The eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gleamed into the study, with a scornful eye gleaming behind it.

"Grooh!" gasped Trumble. "You—you startled me, Gussy!"

"You uttah wottah!"

"Look here, you know——"

"I guessed that you were askin' whethah Gwunday was out, with the wotten intention of waidin' his gwub, Twimble."

"No-n-not at all. I—I came here to—to—to—— Lemme see! I—I came here to—to—to——"

"Pway don't twy to think out any whoppahs, Twimble! You have been twyin' to burgle Gwunday's cupboard. I have heard Gwunday growlin' many times about his gwub bein' waided, you howwid food-hog! I wegard you with contempt!"

"I—I say, what are you doing?" howled Trimble.

The question was superfluous. Arthur Augustus was changing the door-key to the outside of the lock.

"I am goin' to lock you in, Twimble."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Baggy.

"I wegard it as necessary to teach you a lesson about food-hoggin'. Gwunday is going to find you heah when he weturns."

Trimble gave a howl of terror. He knew what to expect from Grundy if that heavy handed-youth found him there when he returned—with the broken screwdriver sticking between door and jamb of the cupboard!

"Gussy, I say——" Trimble bounded to the door, which slammed at the same moment. "Gussy! I—I—I say, lemme out——"

He dragged frantically at the door handle.

Click!

"D'Arcy!" yelled Trimble desperately, through the keyhole. "Gussy, old chap! Oh, you rotter! Come and lemme out, old fellow! You beast!"

There was a sound of receding footsteps, and Baggy Trimble yelled in vain through the keyhole. The swell of St. Jim's was gone. But Baggy could hear a sound of chortling down the passage.

D'Arcy was confiding Baggy's predicament to other fellows, and, to judge by the chortles that followed, it was regarded in the light of a joke.

It did not seem like a joke to the unfortunate grub-hunter.

Baggy dragged at the door till he realised that it was useless. Then he kicked at it, and then he subsided into the silence of dismay. He was locked in—to await Grundy's return.

"Oh, crumbs!" moaned Baggy. "The beast will lick me with a stump. I know he will; he's beast enough! Wilkins will make a fuss about his screwdriver, the rotter! They'll make out I was after their grub! Oh, dear!"

It was a desperate situation.

Grundy & Co. might come in at any time. George Alfred Grundy was down on food-hogs with a heavy down.

He had once taken it upon himself to thrash Racke of the Shell for sneaking sugar into the school against the regulations. As for food-hogging at his expense, that was likely to fill the cup of his wrath to overflowing.

Trimble fairly shivered at the idea of being cornered in the study by the wrathful and indignant Grundy.

He blinked up at the chimney, with the desperate idea in his mind of squeezing up to the room above. But the chimney did not look very inviting, and certainly there was no room for Baggy's wide

circumference to pass. He wandered disconsolately to the window.

Under the window was thick ivy, growing thick and interlaced round a waterpipe from the roof.

Baggy remembered that Grundy had once climbed into his study that way, to show that he could do it. He blinked down at the ivy, and wondered whether he dared risk a descent.

The dusk was falling on the quadrangle, and he was not likely to be observed.

But Baggy's nerve was not equal to it. He stared dismally at the ivy, and shook his head. It was safe enough for a fellow with nerve; but Baggy Trimble was not of the stuff of which heroes are made.

"I—I couldn't do it," mumbled Baggy. "At least, I could, I dare say, but I'm not going to. Oh, dear!"

There was a thump on the door.

"Grundy's coming!" yelled Dick Julian's voice through the keyhole.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Baggy.

He blinked despairingly down from the window. Six feet below was a heavy old stone gutter, over which the ivy lay massed.

Baggy Trimble made up his mind, and slid down through the ivy in the stone gutter, and crouched there, squeezing himself as close to the wall as possible.

There was no danger of falling, even for a funk like Trimble; but nothing would have induced him to swing over the edge of the thick stone, and descend to the quad.

Hoping that the ivy above screened him from view from the study window, Baggy Trimble crouched, palpitating, expecting every moment to hear Grundy's voice above.

And as he crouched, covered with dust and grime, his eyes fell upon a scrap of paper that lay in the stone gutter, amid the thick ivy.

Baggy's round eyes grew larger and rounder as he saw it. The scrap of paper had evidently, at some time, blown out of the window above—probably in the draught between the door and the window—and had fallen among the ivy, and found a lodging in the gutter.

Baggy Trimble breathed hard, as his greedy fat fingers closed upon that precious scrap of paper—a Bank of England note for five pounds!

CHAPTER 9.
Findings Keepings!

"WHY, I'll scalp him!"

Thus George Alfred Grundy, as he unlocked the door of his study, and hurled it open.

Grundy had returned, to find a chuckling crowd gathered outside his study door. The news that Baggy Trimble of the Fourth was locked in his study stirred the righteous wrath of George Alfred.

He strode in, with knitted brows, and his big fists clenched ready for business. Then he stared about him.

"He's not here!"

"Bai Jove! Arthur Augustus looked in. "That is vewy wemarkable, Gwunday! I certainly locked him in!"

"Where is he, then?" grunted the Shell fellow, eyeing D'Arcy suspiciously. He suspected the swell of St. Jim's of pulling his leg.

"Pewwaps he has got up the chimney!" suggested Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Gwunday——"

"Ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Gwunday! I have been doin' you a favah, you ungrateful boundah! I considah——"

"He must have got out of the window," said Talbot of the Shell, laughing.

"Bai Jove! Twimble wouldn't have nerve enough."

"Easy enough to drop into the stone gutter outside," said Julian. "He could get along to another window from there."

Grundy rushed to the window.

He looked down, but only the masses of ivy met his view. But as he scanned the ivy massing over the old stone, he discerned a fat leg protruding from it.

"Here he is!" he exclaimed. "Trimble, you fat villain!"

"Yow-ow! I'm not here!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I haven't been in your study, Grundy!" came a gasping voice from the ivied mass. "I climbed up here from the quad, you know."

"Come in again!" shouted Grundy. "I'm going to squash you!"

"I—I say, Grundy——"

"He's been burgling the cupboard!" shouted Wilkins. "He's busted my screwdriver in the door!"

"I'll go and yank him in!" said Grundy.

"Bai Jove, Gwunday, be careful!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in alarm. "It weally isn't safe, you know——"

"Rats! That stone gutter would bear an elephant!"

"But not a donkey, perhaps!" remarked Julian.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll punch your head another time, Julian! I'm going!"

There was a sudden stirring in the ivy below. Baggy Trimble heard Grundy, and the idea of being collared in such a spot by the Shell fellow made him turn cold all over. There was a drop of a good thirty feet to the ground, if they should fall over the edge.

Baggy wriggled along, through the rustling, grimy ivy, to reach the next window.

The next study belonged to Lennox and Buck Finn of the Shell. Lennox was looking out of his window, grinning.

The Missing Fiver.
(See Chapter 8.)

He grinned still more as Baggy's crimson, dusty face came up through the mass of ivy under his window.

"Help me in!" gasped Trimble. "I say, old chap——"

"Let him alone!" roared Grundy. The Shell fellow already had a leg out of window. "I'm coming after him!"

"Help!" yelled Baggy.

Lennox leaned out and lent a helping hand. Baggy grasped it, and clutched at the ivy with the other. Between the ivy and the helping hand from above, the fat junior scrambled up, and tumbled headlong into Lennox's window.

He rolled over on the floor, gasping.

"Oh dear! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lennox. "Grundy's after you!"

Baggy Trimble leaped to his feet, and scuttled out of the study like a scared rabbit.

There was a roar in the passage as he appeared.

"Here he is!"

"Bai Jove! Heah's Twimble, Gwundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold him!" yelled Gunn. "Keep him for Grundy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble did not wait to be kept for Grundy. He bolted for the stairs, and went down them three at a time. He scudded into the quadrangle, and did not halt till he was under the elms, and more or less in cover.

There he sank upon an oaken bench, gasping like a landed fish, in a state of collapse.

"Yow-ow-ow!" mumbled Baggy. "Grooh-hooh-hooh!"

For ten minutes, at least, Baggy's remarks consisted of "Yow-ow!" and "Grooh-hooh!" Then he began to recover a little.

Grundy was probably searching for him in the School House. There was no sign of him in the quadrangle.

Baggy blinked cautiously round to

make sure that he was unobserved, and then his fat hand slid into his pocket, and came out with the precious slip of crisp paper in it.

The fat Fourth-Former feasted his eyes upon the five-pound note.

Fivers did not often come Baggy Trimble's way, but he knew one when he saw it. He fingered the crisp, rustling paper lovingly. The rustle of it was music to his fat ears.

"Findings keepings!" murmured Trimble. "I can't possibly guess whom this note belongs to—did belong, to, I mean. Findings keepings! It may have been lost there a long time. It's pretty grubby. Of course, I was under Grundy's window, and—and it may have blown out; but—but it can't be Grundy's. He hasn't lost a fiver, or we should have heard about it. He didn't have any fiver except the one that was stolen, and Manners has got that. 'Tain't Grundy's."

Baggy felt quite sure of that.

He was very well aware that it was his duty to take the five-pound note to the Housemaster, so that its proper owner could be inquired after. But that Baggy had no intention of doing.

The note had been lying in the thick ivy in the old stone gutter, and certainly would never have been discovered but for Trimble's escapade. He felt that that gave him a right to it—or he tried to feel so, at all events. He comforted his conscience, which gave him a twinge or two, with the bad old saying that findings are keepings.

After all, whom could the banknote belong to? Nobody had complained of missing a note. Such a loss would have been notified, and posted on the notice-board in both Houses. No fiver had been lost in the School House that Baggy knew of, except the stolen one, and Manners had had that!

"Might even have been dropped there from an aeroplane!" murmured Trimble. "I really don't see how it got there, if it wasn't. Anyway, it's mine, as I found it. I—I don't think I'll mention it, or the fellows might think that—that—that it wasn't mine. No, I won't mention that I found it. May as well let 'em think it's a remittance. After all, why shouldn't I have fivers from home? D'Arcy does sometimes. That will sound all right."

Baggy Trimble's fat face was wreathed in a satisfied grin at the thought.

Many and many a yarn had Trimble related to doubting Thomases in the School House of the splendours of Trimble Hall, his palatial home.

Those yarns never found any believers.

Many a time had Trimble swanked over the handsome remittances his pater was just going to send him. But those remittances had never arrived.

He felt a good inch taller at the idea of swanking about the School House with a real, solid fiver. A genuine fiver—as genuine as any that D'Arcy or Cardew ever had.

How that fiver had fallen into the stone gutter among the ivy under Grundy's study window, was a minor point, which did not trouble Trimble very much.

The major point was that he had a fiver, which would be a solid evidence of the wealth of Trimble Hall and Trimble senior!

And when Trimble reappeared in the School House—keeping a wary eye open for Grundy—he was strutting with his little fat nose in the air, and swelling with importance like a frog in the fable, though not with the same results—which was fortunate or otherwise, according as one looked at it.

CHAPTER 10.
Manners' Reply.

"MANNERS!"

The Shell fellow turned his head wearily.

Manners was weary—weary to the heart. He was anxious to get away from St. Jim's, where this black disgrace had fallen upon him. Anxious, too, because he feared, sometimes, that he could not bear it, and that, in spite of his resolution of self-sacrifice, the truth would come from his lips at last.

He had made his sacrifice—he had saved Reggie. He would not turn back from it. But the temptation was strong.

The relief with which Mr. Manners had received the revelation that it was the elder and not the younger brother who was guilty, was in itself a bitter blow. Was he not his father's son, as well as Reggie? Why should he sacrifice himself for a brother who had always disregarded him, and for a father who cared for him far less than he cared for his younger son?

In the long hours while he lay weak and ill in the ward, such thoughts forced themselves into the unhappy boy's mind.

But though the temptation to speak out the whole truth was strong, he did not waver in his resolution.

For his father's sake he had done this. For his father's sake he would keep up the sacrifice to the bitter end! Even his father should never know what it had cost him to save Reginald.

It was the Head's voice that spoke by his bedside, in the falling dusk of the summer evening. The colour crept into Manners' cheeks, as he met Dr. Holmes' glance.

The last time he had seen the doctor, that face had been grim and stern, full of scornful condemnation. It was changed now.

The Head looked very grave, but that was all.

"Yes, sir?" muttered Manners. He wondered why the Head had come to the ward. He hoped it meant that he was to be sent away quickly—before his resolution could falter and fail him. He felt ill, he was weak, but he was anxious to be gone.

"Manners"—Dr. Holmes' voice was low and kind—"I have just seen and talked with your friends, Merry and Lowther."

"Yes, sir?" said Manners, in wonder.

"They have given me information that was not in my possession before, Manners. When you came to me and confessed the theft, I had not the slightest doubt of your statement. That you could be making an untrue confession, naturally, never even entered my mind. Your friends have now thrown a new light on the matter."

Manners trembled.

"From what they tell me, it is clear, Manners, that you did not enter Grundy's study as you stated—that you did not take the banknote," said Dr. Holmes. "You could not have done so without their knowledge. It appears that on Wednesday afternoon they were with you all the time, excepting while your brother was with you. Your brother left you, and went directly to Grundy's study, and then the note was missed. It was not, therefore, taken by you, Manners!"

The junior did not speak.

"I require to know, Manners, why you came to me and made a false statement, accusing yourself of a crime you had not committed?" said the Head, a note of sternness creeping into his voice.

No reply.

"Was it your intention, Manners, to take upon yourself the theft committed by your younger brother, in order to save him from punishment?"

Manners closed his lips hard.

"Apparently this was your intention, Manners. You told me a lie!"

Manners crimsoned.

"That apart, your action appears to have been dictated by a thoughtless and reckless devotion. You branded yourself as a thief, and perhaps a lie appeared to you a light matter in comparison. Manners, you will tell me the exact facts now! I command you."

Manners licked his dry lips.

"I—I did it, sir!" he articulated.

"You still maintain that statement, Manners?"

"Yes, sir!" Manners' voice was a whisper now. "I—I maintain it, sir!"

"In that case, Manners, I am compelled to regard the statement of Merry and Lowther as false, as they cannot be telling the truth when they declare that you were under their observation all the time—if you really took the banknote."

Manners gasped.

"These two boys I know to be honourable," continued the Head. "But I know it is possible that, in order to save their friend, they have concocted this story to tell me. Am I to believe that that is the case, Manners?"

"No, sir!!" panted Manners.

"Unless their statement is false, Manners, your statement that you took the banknote from Grundy's study must be false!"

Manners groaned.

He had never dreamed of this. His friends, working to save him from his self-accusation, had placed him in a terrible position.

Either he had to admit that he had taken Reggie's guilt upon himself or to accuse his own chums of concocting a lying story to save him.

There was no alternative to that.

The Head waited for him to speak, but no words came. He was thinking of his father—of Mr. Manners' relief when Reggie was cleared, of the blow it would be to him if Reggie came home in disgrace instead of Harry. What he had said he must stand to. He could not withdraw it now. But his chums——.

"Have you nothing to say, Manners?" asked the Head at last, very gravely.

Manners struggled to speak.

"I—I—I've said all I have to say, sir! They—Tom and Monty—they're mistaken, sir!"

"They can scarcely be mistaken, Manners. They know whether they are telling me the truth or not."

Silence.

"Well, Manners?"

"I—I did it, sir!" groaned Manners. "I've said I did it! I'm going away from the school; that's the end of it!"

"That is not the end, Manners. Justice is the end. You repeat to me that you were the person who took Grundy's banknote?"

"Yes!" gasped Manners.

"In that case, Manners, where is the note?"

"The—the note?"

"Yes. It must be returned to Grundy."

"Oh!"

"If you took the note, Manners, it is still in your possession. I intended to reclaim it before you left the school, to return it to Grundy, naturally. I ask you now, Manners, where is the note?"

Manners turned his head away.

In the stress of trouble and excitement he had not even thought of that.

"Answer me, Manners!" said the Head sternly.

"My—my father will make it good, sir," breathed Manners. "He will—will make it up to Grundy, sir."

"That is not the point, Manners. I require the note itself!"

"I—I lost it, sir."

"Manners!"

There was utter wretchedness in Manners' tortured face. He was not a fellow like Trimble or Racke; a lie did not come easily to his lips. When he first made his confession to the Head it had hardly entered his mind that it was a lie at all. It had only seemed to him as a terrible sacrifice he was driven to make. But it was a falsehood, and, like all falsehoods, it required bolstering up with other falsehoods. For there is no end to a lie; it draws after it more and more lies in a never-ending series till the truth be told!

Manners was realising that now. He could bear the disgrace of theft, because he was innocent. But to lie, and know that he was lying, that was harder to bear. The misery in his face moved the Head. Poor Manners was a bad hand at deception. A much less keen man than Dr. Holmes could have detected that there was no truth in his answer.

There was a long silence. Manners did not speak. The Head was plunged in deep and painful thought.

If Manners had stated that he had passed the note, the matter would have been simpler. Grundy had obtained the number of the note from his uncle, and a numbered note could be traced. The statement could have been proved one way or the other. But he stated that he had lost it, and by that statement inquiry was closed up. The Head did not believe his statement; yet it was difficult to see how it could be controverted.

Dr. Holmes spoke at last.

"Manners, I believe that your devotion to your brother has clouded your sense of honour. I cannot believe you. However, I shall leave you now, and endeavour to sift the matter without your aid."

Dr. Holmes left the bedside, and Manners laid his cheek on the pillow, weary and in despair. He had done his best for his brother, and for his father, and it seemed that it was all in vain. The pillow was wet with tears of utter misery.

CHAPTER 11.
The Shadow of Guilt.

TOM MERRY tapped at the door of the Third Form-room, and opened it.

The Third were at evening preparation, and Mr. Selby cast an irritated glance towards the captain of the Shell as he stepped in.

"What is it?" snapped the Third-Form master.

"The Head wishes to see Manners minor, sir!"

"Very well. Go at once, Manners, minor."

Reggie rose from his place, and followed Tom Merry out of the Form-room. The Third were left wondering what was up now. But Mr. Selby's pointer soon drew their wandering thoughts back to prep.

Tom did not speak to the fag. His face was much brighter than it had been that day. His interview with the Head had been followed by Dr. Holmes' visit to the sanatorium, and Tom hoped that all was going well.

"What does the old duffer want?" growled Reggie, as the captain of the Shell did not speak.

"He wants you."

"About that rotten affair again?"

"You'll know when you see him."

Reggie sneered.

"Have you been starting again?" he asked scoffingly. "Well, the Head won't let you, any more than Railton would!"

Tom Merry did not reply to that, and the fag, with an angry, sullen face went to the Head's study. Tom Merry rejoined Lowther. The latter was also looking more hopeful.

"Looks as if the Head thinks it was Reggie after all," muttered Lowther. "He knows now that it wasn't Manners, anyway."

Tom Merry nodded.

"It wasn't Manners!" he said. "We've proved that. I—I can't quite think it was Reggie, either. But—but the Head will find out. I can't think who else it could have been. It was somebody!"

Meanwhile Reggie was in the presence of the Head. He was wondering, but he did not look uneasy. The doctor's grave expression, however, struck him with a vague sense of disquietude.

"Manners minor, certain facts have now come to light," said Dr. Holmes. "It is now clear that it was not your brother who abstracted the banknote from Grundy's study!"

Reggie started.

"It—it wasn't?" he stammered.

"No."

"But—but he said it was, sir!" ejaculated Reggie, in blank bewilderment.

"I am afraid, Manners minor, that your brother made that pretended confession with no object but to clear you of the charge."

"He—he wouldn't, sir! Why, it's impossible! He wouldn't!"

"I fear that that is the case, however, Manners minor!"

Reggie stared helplessly.

"He wouldn't!" he repeated. "As if he would! He was always interfering with me; he never let me alone!"

"Considering what has come to light of your habits, for which I have punished you, Manners minor, it was your brother's duty to interfere with you very seriously," said the Head. "Your brother appears to have carried his sense of responsibility for you to an unheard-of length. As his innocence seems to be established, in spite of his own statements, the whole matter returns to the point from which it started. It is upon you, Manners minor, as in the beginning, that suspicion falls."

"Oh!" gasped Reggie.

"You understand me?"

"But—but you know I didn't do it, sir!" gasped the fag in dismay now.

"Unfortunately, I do not know it. Your brother's confession is now ruled out of consideration. Now, Manners minor, you will tell me exactly what you did in Grundy's study. The exact facts, please."

"I—I only went there to rag the study," groaned Reggie. "I—I wish I hadn't now, but he had bothered me. It was only a jape. I never knew the banknote was in the table-drawer. I didn't know he had a banknote. I—I chucked some of the things out of the drawer—books and papers and things—across the study, and spilt ink on the rest. I was going to do some more when Wilkins came in. I never saw any banknote."

The fag's manner, though scared, was sincere. It was difficult to believe that he was not telling the truth.

Dr. Holmes sighed.

"You—you believe me, sir?" panted Reggie. "I swear I never saw any banknote! If Harry took it, he must have done it before I went there, because they missed it just afterwards."

"You went to Grundy's study after leaving your brother in his room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Until the moment you visited your brother, Manners minor, Merry and Lowther were with him, and he could not have gone to Grundy's room without their knowledge They declare that he did not go."

"Oh!" said Reggie, utterly taken aback.

"You see, therefore——"

"I—I never touched it, sir! I—I may have chucked it out along with the papers without seeing it——"

"Mr. Railton searched the study, and it was not there."

"I—I don't know what could have become of it, then, sir, unless some other fellow had sneaked in and taken it, if Harry didn't."

"The banknote had been there only a very short time when it was taken, Manners minor, only while Grundy was gone to the dormitory to change his clothes."

"I—I didn't do it, sir."

Dr. Holmes passed his hand across his brow.

"You may go, Manners minor. Tell Merry and Lowther to come here."

"Yes, sir."

Reggie Manners left the study, and in the passage he gave the chums of the Shell a furious look.

"The Head wants you!" he snarled. "So you're trying to fix it on me again, you rotters! You won't succeed, though!"

Reggie felt, quite naturally, that he had a right to be angry. He was not guilty, and Harry had confessed. What more could anyone want?

But these fellows stuck to their guns!

Without replying, the chums of the Shell went to the Head's study. They were feeling very hopeful now.

Dr. Holmes scanned them, as they stood before him, as if he would read their very souls.

"Manners minor still denies any knowledge of the banknote," he said. "His brother still maintains that he was the guilty party."

"It's not true, sir," said Tom steadily. "He's doing it for his father's sake, and it's not true!"

"We've proved that, sir," said Lowther.

"Your statement, if true, proves it," said the Head.

"If true?" exclaimed Tom, flushing.

"Yes, Merry. I cannot disregard the possibility that you two boys have concocted this story between you."

The two Shell fellows stood dumb.

That had not even occurred to their minds, so far. It had not even occurred to Ralph Cardew, when he suggested the alibi for Manners. The Head scanned the crimson faces earnestly.

"I do not think this," he added hastily. "I cannot think it! But it is possible, and Manners' own confession, which, he maintains, cannot be disregarded."

"We've told you the exact truth, sir," said Tom Merry, at last. "We can't do more than that. I never thought you would doubt my word, sir."

"I do not, Merry. But if you are speaking the truth, Manners is speaking falsely."

"I've told you his reason, sir."

"True. But—— The Head paused. "You repeat that, to your certain knowledge, Manners did not enter Grundy's study before the banknote was missed?"

"Yes, sir!" said the two juniors together.

"Very well. I shall now consult with Mr. Railton, and decide upon the next step to be taken. Kindly ask Mr. Railton to step here."

Tom and Lowther left the study. They delivered the Head's message to the Housemaster, and then went dismally to the Common-room. The matter, which they had hoped was cleared up so far as their chum was concerned, was evidently not at an end yet. What was the end to be?

CHAPTER 12.
Trimble in Trouble.

"BAI Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that ejaculation, as Baggy Trimble came into the junior Common-room in the School House.

The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyeglass very curiously upon Baggy. A good many other fellows glanced at him, too, and grinned.

The fat Fourth-Former was strutting in very noticeable style.

His fat nose was high in the air, his fat chin thrust out, and he seemed to disdain the floor under his large feet.

Even Baggy Trimble had never before shown such extraordinary swank.

He condescended to smile at the grinning juniors. But some of the swank faded away as he caught sight of George Alfred Grundy. He gave Grundy a nervous blink. But the burly Shell fellow only bestowed a snort of contempt upon him. Grundy's wrath was terrific while it lasted, but it never lasted long.

"Ah! Glad to see you Gussy," said Trimble familiarly. "I want you to do me a little favour, dear boy."

"Wats!"

"Now, Gussy, old scout——"

"I have sevewal times wequested you not to addwess me as Gussy, Twimble!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Trimble independently. "I don't want to borrow any of your silly bobs, D'Arcy."

"It is wathah a new departuah for you, Twimble, if you do not want to bowwow any bobs!" said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Rats! I say, Talbot, old chap——"

Talbot of the Shell laughed good-humouredly.

"Well, Baggy?"

"Can you change a fiver for me?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Talbot.

"Well, can you?"

"Sorry, no."

"I'm your man, Baggy," called out Reilly of the Fourth.

Baggy Trimble turned to the Belfast junior at once.

"Right-ho, Reilly! You've got five quids?"

"Badad, no!"

"How can you change my fiver, then?"

"Well, I've got five quids as much as you've got a fiver!" explained Reilly. "I'll trade the five quids I haven't got against the five-pound note you haven't got. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Trimble. "I say, Racke, change a fiver for me, old chap!"

"Bow-wow!" said Racke.

"How much do you want for it?" grinned Sidney Clive. "If fourpence would do——"

"I want five pounds, of course, you duffer! You've got lots of tin, Cardew."

"And lots of sense to look after it!" smiled Cardew.

"But I've got a fiver!" shrieked Trimble.

"Make it yourself?" chuckled Blake.

"No, you ass! It's a remittance from Trimble Hall."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. They had heard of Trimble Hall before. Baggy glared wrathfully at the merry youths. His swank did not seem to be going down, somehow.

"Look here, you silly chumps, if you don't believe I've had a fiver from my pater——" he shouted.

"Of course we don't," said Levison. "Don't be an ass!"

"Well, what do you call that, then?" Baggy Trimble shoved out a fat fist.

with a five-pound note in it. There was a buzz of amazed interest as the School House juniors gathered round to look at it. Baggy Trimble, the impecunious and incessant borrower, in possession of such a sum as five whole quids was extremely interesting.

"Bai Jove! It's a weal one!" said Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Not made in Germany!" chuckled Dig.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course it's a real one!" sniffed Trimble. "Do you think my pater would send me a bad one? Change it for me, Cardew, will you?"

Ralph Cardew gave the fat junior a very cold look.

"I'll change it for you fast enough if it's yours," he said. "I want to have a little information on that point first."

"Eh? Of course it's mine—from Trimble Hall, you know."

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, struck by Cardew's tone. "Twimble, you young ass, is that fivah weally yours?"

"Yes!" roared Trimble wrathfully.

The juniors were looking very doubtful now. A five-pound note in the impecunious fellow's possession would have been surprising enough, anyway. The fact that a five-pound note was lately missing could hardly fail to come into their minds in connection with Trimble's accession to wealth.

"My only hat!" said Grundy, with a deep breath. "Was it Trimble, after all, then?"

"He's got a fiver," said Cardew, shrugging his shoulders. "We know he never has any money. He's got a fiver, and a fiver's missin'!"

"You mean the one Manners took," sneered Racke. "Manners wouldn't give that one to Trimble, I suppose?"

"I mean the one Manners didn't take," said Cardew, unmoved.

"Bai Jove! Do you know the numbah of your fivah, Gwundy?"

"Yes. I've got it here."

"Look at Twimble's fivah, then!"

Trimble's fat fist closed on his fiver. He was alarmed. To do the fat junior justice, his obtuse mind had not given the stolen fiver a single thought in connection with the banknote he had found.

"I—I say!" he gasped. "This isn't Grundy's fiver, you know. This—this is mine! Manners had that one; he's got it now——"

"What's that?" rapped a voice in the doorway. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther came into the Common-room.

"Looks interestin'," yawned Cardew. "Trimble's got a fiver. And he doesn't want Grundy to see the number."

"Great Scott!"

"It's mine!" yelled Trimble. "From—from Trimble Hall, you know."

Tom Merry came forward, his eyes gleaming.

"You've got the number of your note, Grundy. Show that banknote to Grundy at once, Trimble!"

"I—I won't! I——"

"Why not?" rapped the captain of the Shell.

"I—I—I——"

Tom Merry wasted no more time in words. He grasped Trimble's fat hand, forced it open, and held up the banknote for all to see. Grundy consulted a slip of paper in his pocket.

"000468," he said.

"000468!" said a dozen voices, as the juniors scanned the banknote.

"Oh!" gasped Trimble.

"That's my note!" said Grundy grimly.

There was a roar at once.

"And Trimble's the thief!"

CHAPTER 13.
At Last!

TOM MERRY'S grasp closed on the shoulder of Baggy Trimble.

His eyes were blazing.

Manners was cleared now—the note was found! Manners' reckless confession would not count for much against this. And Reggie, too—Reggie was cleared!

The juniors buzzed with wrath and indignation, and Baggy Trimble eyed them apprehensively.

"Twimble's the wotten thief, bai Jove!"

"Oh, you fat rotter!"

"Take him to the Head!"

"Hold on!" spluttered Trimble. "I—I'm not a thief, you rotters! Do you think I've stolen that note?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's pretty clear you have," said Tom Merry.

"I haven't!" roared Trimble. "I got it from Trimble Hall——"

"Come to the Head, and tell him that!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Yarooh! I didn't mean Trimble Hall! I—I found it!"

"Yes; in Grundy's study, you fat thief!" said Monty Lowther.

"No, I didn't!" Trimble was terribly alarmed now. Even his obtuse brain could realise that, since the numbers were the same, this was the stolen note; and he understood the position he had placed himself in. "I—I'll tell you how I got it! Finding keepings, you know! I picked it up. I—I never knew it was Grundy's note. I swear I didn't!"

"Where did you pick it up, then?" asked Blake.

Baggy Trimble explained breathlessly.

Baggy was a first-class Prussian; but it was pretty clear that he was telling the truth now. His words came out in a terrified stream.

"Likely yarn!" sneered Crooke, when he had finished.

"It's likely enough," said Grundy. "That young cad, Manners minor, chucked things out of my table-drawer when he was ragging the study. He chucked out the banknote among the rest. Well, it's light, and it blew out of window. Natural enough—there's a draught when the door's open."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"More likely he stole it," sneered Racke.

"Yarooh! I didn't—I never—I didn't know it was Grundy's note!" shrieked Trimble. "Think I'd have shown it off here if I'd known that?"

There was a laugh. It was pretty clear that Trimble had not known that it was Grundy's note. Even Trimble would scarcely have shown it off in the Common-room if he had stolen it.

"I suppose the fat rotter's telling the truth," said Tom Merry. "He picked it up in the gutter under Grundy's window. But it was as bad as stealing to keep it."

"Findings keepings, you know," stuttered Baggy.

"You said you had it fwom Twimble Hall, you fat wascal!"

"That was only—only a figure of speech, you know."

"Well, you can come and tell the Head, and you'd better leave out the figures of speech," said Tom Merry.

And Baggy Trimble was led away to the Head's study, Grundy following with the banknote.

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton were talking in low tones, both in a troubled frame of mind, when Tom Merry knocked and opened the door.

They looked in surprise at his flushed, happy face.

"Merry——"

"The banknote's found, sir!" gasped Tom.

"What?"

"Here it is, sir!" said Grundy.

"Bless my soul!"

"It was chucked out of the drawer along with my papers, sir, I think, when that cheeky fag ragged my study," said Grundy; "and the draught whisked it out of the window. Trimble found it in the stone gutter under my window, fallen among the ivy."

"Then it was not stolen at all!" exclaimed the Head.

"No, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's been lying there all the time. There wasn't a thief at all, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

The Head's kind old face lighted up, and Mr. Railton looked very much relieved.

"Now you know that Manners, sir——" began Lowther.

"Manners, evidently, is innocent," said the Head, with a smile. "I shall excuse his foolish confession, as his motive was generous. He will tell me the facts now that his brother also is cleared. Grundy, you will kindly be more careful with your money in future; you should lock it up."

"Can we go and see Manners, sir?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Certainly!"

The chums of the Shell rushed away. Five minutes later Miss Marie, with a smiling face, led them into the ward. Manners gave them a dreary look. But his expression changed as his chums rushed to the bedside.

"Manners, old chap——" gasped Tom.

"Manners," panted Lowther, seizing the Shell fellow's hand, and wringing it in his excitement, "it's all serene!"

"The banknote's found——"

"It wasn't stolen——"

"It was lost——"

"That silly young fool Reggie——"

"Chucked it about without seeing it among the papers——"

"Fell in the ivy——"

Manners sat up dazedly, as his chums panted out those somewhat incoherent explanations. His face was like sunshine now.

"Tom!" he whispered. "Monty!"

"It's all right about Reggie, and you've got to tell the merry truth now," grinned Lowther. "If you'd remembered George Washington in time, you wouldn't have done this, you howling ass!"

"We'll buy you a little hatchet after this," said Tom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners was in his place in the Shell the next day, looking a little pale and worn, but otherwise quite his old self. His brother's innocence being proved lightened his heart more than the clearing of his own name. He received the most hearty congratulations on all sides —though most of the fellows agreed that he had played the giddy ox, and that his minor wasn't worth it. Baggy Trimble took all the credit of the clearing up of the mystery to himself—to such an extent that he pointed out to Grundy that he was entitled to, at least, halves in the fiver. All he got from Grundy, however, was a thick ear; and he let the subject drop after that.

Manners looked pale, but quite happy, as he watched the Grammar School match that afternoon. And after that, Reggie came up to the study, and Tom Merry and Lowther left the brothers alone. Reggie's face was red and pale by turns, and he looked deeply troubled.

"I—I suppose the pater knows, Harry," he began hesitatingly.

"I wrote to him last night, of course."

"I'm glad it came out all right, Harry."

"So am I!" said Manners grimly.

"I thought it was you, when you confessed."

"I thought it was you, so I confessed."

Reggie's face worked a little.

"I—I never dreamed you'd do a thing like that for me!" he faltered. "I—I've been an awful cad to you. I own up! But who'd have thought——" He broke off. "I—I say, Harry——"

"Well?" said Manners, his face softening. It was evident enough that his brother's sacrifice had touched the fag to the very heart, and that he was in a repentant mood.

"I—I'm sorry! I—I won't play the goat again. That was really the cause of all this. I say, I—I'm sorry I ever played the fool!" The words came out with a rush. "I'm going straight now—straight as a string. I never thought you'd do such a thing for me. I—I won't give you anything to grumble at after this, old chap!"

"All serene, kid," said Manners softly.

Ten minutes later there was a diplomatic cough at the door. Manners looked round with a smile.

"All right, your chaps; come in! Only having a jaw with Reggie!"

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's —"D'ARCY'S DEAL!" by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"D'ARCY'S DEAL!"

By Martin Clifford.

The capacity of the one and only Arthur Augustus for doing silly things is phenomenal. He can be as foolish as he is good-hearted and generous; and more than that it would be hard to say.

Next week you will read of how he bought a pony. Now, it is plain that a pony is a pretty useless possession to a schoolboy, except in the holidays. All D'Arcy's chums see that. But he refuses to see it, and goes his own wilful way, and, of course, lands himself up to the neck in trouble.

MORE ABOUT CADET CORPS.

The regimental sergeant-major of the South London Cadets drops me a line to say that he would like to give publicity in my Chat columns to his corps. As a matter of fact, it is a par in the "Magnet" he asks for, as it was there that I referred to the Queen's Cadets. But I am giving it here because I had not room in the "Magnet" this week, and I know most of you read both papers. As for those who don't—so much the better, so far as this matter is concerned, as this may catch the eyes of a few who did not see the former par.

I am asked to insert this notice, and I do it with the greatest pleasure.

"Lads living in Camberwell, Brixton, Kennington, and Clapham, between the ages of 14 and 17, who are desirous of joining a Cadet Corps, are invited to apply any evening from 7.30 to 10 o'clock at 6, Flodden Road, Camberwell, where full particulars can be obtained."

The particulars sent me include brief details of the activities of the corps during 1916, from which it is evident that much good work was done; a balance-sheet, which makes it clear that the money was expended wisely and well; a list of subscribers, headed by the name of Lord Northcliffe, the founder of the Amalgamated Press; and a long Roll of Honour of which the corps may feel justly proud.

Sir Victor Horsley, the great surgeon, who died in the cause of the Empire in Mesopotamia, and Lady Horsley have given constant support to the corps. Without their generous help it would have been disbanded years ago. It was formed in 1902, and is affiliated to the 1st Surrey Rifles. Monetary help is needed, and if this should catch the eye of anyone who cares to give it, he or she can send a subscription to the Officer Commanding, South London Cadets, Headquarters, Flodden Road, Camberwell, S.E. 5.

There may be some among my older readers who will be moved to help so good a cause. I am sending along a small subscription myself, for I have the firmest belief in the splendid work done by these corps.

The Queen's Cadets, of course, to which I made reference in the "Magnet" a few weeks ago, are naturally equally deserving of help of this kind; and I am in no position to say which corps needs it most. All I can say is that I am sure the money will be well used. The future of our great Empire will be in the hands of the boys of to-day, and discipline, esprit de corps, and the many other good lessons inculcated by the cadet training will count heavily here.

NOTICES.

Back Numbers Wanted.

By Harold G. Marshall, 177, Reeder Avenue, Cavarly, Detroit, U.S.A.—GEM, 371-450. 10s. offered.

By James B. Clarence, William Street, East, Stockton, Newcastle, N.S.W., Australia.—GEM, 150-364. £1 offered, or published price for any numbers between 1 and 364.

By M. McGowan, 168, Chatham Street, Montreal, Canada.—"On His Honour" and "Conscripts of St. Jim's."

By C. Bancroft, 117, Northampton Road, Market Harborough.—"Tom Merry & Co.," "Tom Merry in the Rockies," "St. Jim's Airmen," "Schoolboy Explorers," "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," and "Penny Popular," for January 5th, 1917.

By F. Reid, 12, Fitzwilliam Avenue, Belfast, —GEM, any numbers between 1 and 439.

By Norman Paton, 99, Perth Road, Dundee. —Both GEM and "Magnet," numbers 250-300.

By A. Mudie, 34, Hampton Road, Walworth, S.E.—GEM and "Magnet," Christmas Numbers, 1908-1913, and a few halfpenny issues.

By O. M. Evans, Handsworth, Queen's Park Parade, Northampton.—"Beyond the Eternal Ice" (="Boys' Friend" 3d. Library).

By J. H. Mate, Market Place, Lechlade, Glos.—First 20 1d. numbers of GEM.

By Samuel Ross, 112, Walker Road, Torry, Aberdeen.—GEM and "Magnet" between 1908 and 1914; half-price offered.

By William Barnes, 28, Railway Avenue, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa.—Early Talbot stories.

Your Editor

Extracts from "Tom Merry's Weekly."

JOHNNY GOGGS AT ST. JIM'S. By Clifton Dane.

(Continued from last week's number)

VII.

"MR. RATCLIFF would like to speak to you, if your name is Goggs," said Clampe to my visitor in the pavilion.

Kildare and Baker were at that moment going out to open the innings of the scratch team. Grundy was absent from the side of Goggs. I was in the field. And nobody else stood near enough to hear. Clampe was careful about that.

"I have not the pleasure of Mr. Ratcliff's acquaintance," replied Goggs—"or of yours, for that matter."

Goggs did not greatly fancy the look of Clampe. And if that worthy had given his true name it would have been recognised, for Goggs is not much in the way of forgetting things, and Clampe's name had been mentioned in the dormitory the night before.

"Oh, I'm Proud of the New House!" replied Clampe, who has no objection in the world to saying the thing which is not.

"Indeed? I trust the New House is also proud of you," Goggs answered.

"Don't be funny!" snapped Clampe.

"Nothing could be further from my wishes. Do I look funny?"

"Oh, rather! Funniest object I ever saw, bar Skimmy!" Clampe said, with a snigger.

"I fear that you are not a polite person, Proud. If my face is funny, that is a misfortune which should not be thrown in it. I do not know Skimmy, but I think that I would rather have his acquaintance, in spite of any defects in his personal appearance, than yours."

"It ain't a question of me or Skimmy; it's Ratty," said Clampe.

"And is he?" asked Goggs.

Clampe stared.

"Is he what?"

Goggs looked at him with a mild and pitying pair of glasses.

"I fear, Proud, that among your reasons for being proud can hardly be your superior intelligence," he said.

"Oh, swig! You mean is Ratty ratty?"

"You are not rapid, Proud, but you are evidently a—er—sticker. Yes, I think that is the expression—a sticker."

"Eh? What d'ye mean, you blinking ass?"

"Think it out, Proud—think it out! And when, by hard thinking—in short, by sticking—you have done so, then be proud again, Proud. In fact, be ever Proud!"

Goggs had smelt a rat. He would not have talked to Clampe like that if he had not. I am not sure now whether he had yet any idea who "Proud" really was. But I think there is little doubt that he guessed Racke & Co. had sent him.

This seems rather like making him out an ass, to walk straight into the jaws of danger, for he must have known Racke & Co. did not want him for his own good.

But he is not an ass—very far from it!

Or his going without saying anything to anybody may look like swank—an overplus of self-confidence.

Well, Goggs is self-confident. But he has good cause to be, for you won't easily find a better man than he is at keeping up his end in a tight place.

But swanky he is not.

"Well, are you coming?" snarled Proud-Clampe.

"Certainly I am coming, Proud. I am never wilfully and wantonly disrespectful to those in authority; and if Mr.—er—Ratty desires a pleasant chat with me, I shall be—er proud, Proud, and pleased, Proud, to wait upon him."

"If you talk to him like you've been talking to me——"

Clampe had almost forgotten that it was not Ratty who wanted Goggs.

"Oh, I should not do that! Probably Mr. Ratty is not proud, Proud. But do you not think I had better wait to have my innings first?"

"Do you collect ducks' eggs, then?"

"No, Proud—no! Even though I did, I should not do it by deputy, so do not offer to bat in my place. Doubtless the amiable gentleman with the very unamiable name will not detain me long."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," answered Clampe, with a nasty grin. "But you'd better come at once, or Ratty will be ratty; that's a dead cert."

"Will he not be Ratty in any case? But that is mere jesting, and probably your sense of humour is not your strongest point, Proud. Long may Mr. Ratty wave—I mean, of course, rule the waves—no, that's Britannia. Dear me, how confused I am getting! My ugly mistake, Proud. I'm always making them."

It is a danger-signal when Goggs says he is getting confused. He is never clearer-headed than at such moments.

And he was not in the least confused now, of course. He knew that Clampe was up to some trick. He did not expect to be taken to Mr. Ratcliff. But he did not know where Clampe meant to take him, or for what purpose. And he wanted very much to know.

Clampe was surly. He did not appear to care for affable chat. But Goggs refused to be choked off.

"So you are in the New House, Proud?" he said as they went away together.

"Yes. Didn't I say so?"

"Do you happen to know a fellow named —er—Lampe, is it? Or Stamp, perhaps? No, Clampe."

"What do I know him!" growled Clampe.

"What about him?"

"Rather a nice chap, isn't he? A go-ahead sporting kind of individual?"

Clampe was flushing and scowling now.

"He's all right, for anything I know!" he said sulkily.

"Oh, I'm pleased to hear it! Not a bit of a worm, then? Not a sneaking, smoky type of person, with a face like a gorilla and a head like a hippopotamus?"

Whatever Clampe's face may be like—and I should not be keen on going about with it in front of me—his hide is certainly not all that thick. It could evidently be pierced.

"Look here, you chuckle-headed image!" he snorted, stopping dead. "For two pins I'd——"

"Apologies, Clampe—Proud, I mean, of course. I was not aware that Proud—er—that is Clampe—dear me! How very confused I am getting!—was a friend of yours."

"Well, he is then! So just you dry up about him. If he heard you he'd jolly well wipe the floor with you!"

"That would be very unpleasant. I should not like that at all," said Goggs primly. "If I were you, Clampe, I should do what in me lay to check the tendency of my friend Proud—er—to have got wrong again. But you know what I mean—towards personal violence. He might get hurt, or he might hurt someone. And I am sure he would regret either contingency."

"I ain't so jolly sure!" snarled Clampe.

If Clampe had believed himself capable of putting the job through on his own, he would have gone for Goggs then and there. But, though he had a dim suspicion, he hadn't brains enough to see that the simple-looking youth had pierced the mystery of his identity.

He must have thought it was quite all right when Goggs meekly followed him upstairs in the New House. Mr. Ratcliff was out that afternoon, as Clampe was well aware, and the black sheep had planned their game with Goggs to be played in the New House for that reason.

"Mr. Railton," remarked Goggs, "has a study on the ground floor. I should have thought that would have been much more convenient here."

"We don't do things like the School House!" growled Clampe.

He tapped at a door. Clampe is not a first-class actor, but it's easy enough to tap at a door, and it's all right as a signal to those inside.

Perhaps Goggs overdid his confidence in himself. He must have had his doubts the moment after Clampe had tapped at that door. For as it opened Clampe stooped, seized him round the legs, and barged him forward while someone inside, with great promptitude, dropped a sack over his head.

And here showed the greatness of Goggs.

Almost any other fellow would have struggled, though knowing it vain.

Goggs did not struggle at all.

"Is that you, Racke?" he asked coolly. "Crooke is there also, no doubt. And Scrope, perhaps? And the other person—I forget his name, but he has a sly face and very big ears."

"That's one to your address, Mellish!" chuckled Scrope.

"Ah, Mellish—that is the name! I cannot truthfully say that I am pleased to see you, Mellish. In the first place, because I cannot see you; and in the second place, because yours is not the kind of face that appeals to me. But——"

"Oh, gag him!" said Mellish crossly.

"I'm going to!" answered Racke.

And his tones left no doubt that he meant it.

Clampe was busy with Goggs' legs, tying them together. He pulled the rope tight, but Goggs did not mention the fact that it hurt him. To do so would have been to give Clampe pleasure, without any advantage on the other side.

Crooke was tying Goggs' hands.

"I have not heard Crooke's voice," said Goggs mildly. "But I feel sure that my dear friend Crooke is present at this nice little entertainment."

"Oh, I'm here!" snarled Crooke, making a knot.

"Good! I should have missed you, Crooke. Racke, Crooke, Scrope, Mellish, Clampe—er—I mean, Proud, of course. But, of course, you are all proud. This is something of which you may well feel truly proud."

"Kick the sarcastic rotter for me, Mellish!" Crooke said savagely.

"There's one for Crooke, and there's another for myself!" said the noble Percy Mellish, complying with the request.

"Thanks awfully!" Goggs said. "So kind of you, Mellish!"

"You'll sing another tune before we're done with you, you interloping cad!" said Racke viciously.

"I regret to say that I have not a singing voice. But if you can bear what I should not flatter myself by calling harmony——"

It appeared that they could not, for at this something was thrust roughly into Goggs' mouth, and he found himself most effectively gagged.

The sack had covered Goggs' face, but had left his mouth almost free. Now he could speak no more, and both his hands and legs were tied.

"If you'll apologise for all you've done, admitting that it's like your beastly cheek to have come here at all, and——"

"How's the rotter going to admit all that while he's gagged, Crooke, you idiot?" asked Clampe.

"He can nod his fat head, can't he? Pull the sack off him, Mellish!"

Mellish pulled it off. He grabbed hold of Goggs' nose in doing so, apparently animated by the kindly thought of taking that organ away in the sack.

But the nose did not come. Mellish was disappointed, but consoled himself with the fact that it had been rendered very red.

And I dare say Goggs cut rather a ridiculous figure as he lay there bound and gagged, with the big glasses obscuring his bright blue eyes, and his nose made ruddy by the gentle attentions of Percy Mellish.

But that only shows that it is a mistake to judge by appearances. For Goggs was only outwardly ridiculous. Inwardly he was of the noble army of martyrs. As soon might a martyr abjure the faith he held as Goggs give in to those sweeps, whatever they might do to him.

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"Nod your head if you mean to apologise and we'll think about letting you off," said Crooke magnanimously.

Goggs shook his head with vigour.

VIII.

"BLINDFOLD the bounder!" commanded Racke.

"Shall I take his goggles off?" asked Mellish.

"No. You can tie something over them." Goggs was blindfolded. The operation was not quite as thorough as it might have been had his spectacles been removed, for he found that some glimmer of light still came to him. But he could not have remarked on the fact if he had wanted to, and he did not want to.

"Plenty more rope, isn't there?" Racke asked.

"Oh, heaps! But he's tied up all right," replied Crooke.

Goggs felt like grinning, but didn't. Crooke had tied his hands. Crooke is a chumpy blighter; no Boy Scout effectiveness of knots about him! Goggs was tolerably sure that he could soon set himself free, once he was left alone.

"Let's hang him out of the window!" said Racke.

The room they had chosen for trapping Goggs was an empty one on the study floor, the only window of which looked upon a blank wall. There was little risk of anyone in authority seeing their victim if they hung him out, and the idea struck the whole crowd as quite a first-class one.

"We can't very well hang him by the neck, I suppose?" said Crooke, as if half in doubt.

"Wish we could!" sighed Clampe, who still felt resentful.

"Don't be idiots!" snapped Racke. "We aren't goin' to murder the outsider, though I don't suppose anyone would miss a specimen like him. But he's goin' to have the most unpleasant hour of his life!"

Goggs thought that for once Racke might be telling the truth. If the knots were entrusted to Crooke, his mind would be very far from easy. And he was not. And he was by no means sure that any of the rest were far ahead of Crooke in the matter of dealing with knots.

A rope was run round under his armpits, and like a sack of it was fastened to a hook in the wall inside. Then he was lifted bodily out of the window.

The breeze blew around him stirring his light flannels. He could feel it blow up his legs. And he got just a glimpse of the flags below—a long way down, it looked.

"Hope you'll enjoy yourself, you meddling rotter!" said Racke.

"Try some of your giddy ventriloquism now!" snarled Crooke.

"Feel proud?" chuckled Clampe.

Scrope and Mellish said nothing. I fancy they were feeling above a bit uneasy.

But they went away with the rest.

Goggs knew there. Could stick in quite a long piece here about how he felt. But it would be imagination, not solid fact, for he did not tell me.

I dare say he thought of the match, and felt on his side about letting Wingate down. But I am jolly sure he did not think about what an awful bump it would be—no, "sickening thud"; those are the right words —when he hit the flags, or how young he was to die or anything at all like that.

-He did not mean to hit the flags, or to die just yet, you see!

I don't think he began to form schemes of vengeance at once, either. He was too busy getting loose.

Must have been an anxious job, too. He relied upon the slovenliness of Crooke's work with the rope to get his hands free. But there might have been equal slovenliness in fixing up the rope under his armpits. And he had to wriggle to get out, and wriggling might——

But he chanced it, of course!

It took a good deal of wriggling. And wriggling caused Goggs to spin slowly round in a most annoying way. And I should not think the flags below looked any nearer as he glanced down at them behind his glasses and cloth which had been tied over them. But perhaps he had nerve enough not to glance down at all. Not sure I should have had!

At last Crooke's silly knots were loosened, and Goggs had his hands free.

But that did not mean the end of his troubles. He had been lowered so far that he could not reach the window-ledge above. And he could not put his arms up over his head while he hung by the rope under his armpits, of course, for if he had tried to do it —well, he would not have been hanging, that's all!

With great care, by keeping his elbows close to his sides, bending his neck, and moving only his forearms, he managed to get the cloth off. Then he took off his glasses, and put them in a pocket.

Now he saw a rainpipe within two or three feet of him. He took all the risk of a bad fastening to the rope inside, and, with his face to the wall, swung sideways till he could grip it.

His legs were still tied, you know, and it needed rare gymnastic skill to work himself up that pipe by his hands. But he did it; and he grabbed the window-ledge, and scrambled over it into the room.

He fell all in a heap, but that did not matter. He was cutting the rope around his legs within a couple of seconds, and within ten minutes of the departure of the five he stood free.

Not quite free, though! The door was locked on the outside.

"As this stage some fellows would have turned up the game, and have sat down to await the coming back of the enemy.

Goggs did not. He walked to the window, glanced at the rainpipe, swung himself out, and slid down it.

Down below, he looked ruefully at the green and rusty stains on his flannels. Then he put on his glasses again, and walked round the corner and into the House.

Upstairs he went, as coolly as if the place was home.

In the study passage he met Dick Redfern, who had a strained wrist, which he was nursing in a sling.

"Hallo!" said Reddy, in surprise.

"You do not know me," said Goggs. "I am staying for a day or two at the School House as the guest of Dane."

"Oh, you're Goggs of Framlingham, then! I've heard of you, I say, you did put those beauties through it last night!"

"I was, I believe, of some slight assistance to my friend Grundy in dealing with the improper desire of Racke and Crooke to go on what I understand, called the ramdan."

replied Goggs, in his serious way.

"Oh, rats! Grundy's a burbling old donkey! He could never have put through a wheeze like that!"

"Now these very improperly behaved persons have, I regret to say, taken down my number—pardon me if I use an incorrect term, but I think you will understand!"

"You don't look as if you'd been put through it some!" said Reddy, grinning. "Your flannels—but I can lend you a pair!"

"Thank you very much! I will with gratitude avail myself of your kindly offer. But first—and for fear that your flannels may suffer—I am round which is to follow—may I ask you——"

"Any old thing!" said Reddy, with genial recklessness. "I'm crocked, as you see; but Owen and Lawrence will help. I know, and I'm what I can one-handed!"

"Do you wish me to explain first?" asked Goggs.

"If it's in three volumes," said Reddy, "you'd better do it afterwards. We're game to back up Racke and that crew without any giddy explanation!"

"Then I will defer it," said Goggs. "Let me be succinct!"

"You might try," replied Reddy.

He is a budding journalist, you know, and has lots of words that most fellows haven't. He knew Goggs meant "brief and to the point." And he grinned, because he did not think Goggs could be.

But there he was mistaken.

"Do you know where my dear friends are?" Goggs asked.

"I do. They're in Clampe's study playing banker."

"Is Mr. Ratcliff at home?"

"Ratty? No. He's out for the afternoon. You don't want Ratty, do you?"

"I do not want him for myself. But he might return unexpectedly. I take it?"

"He might. But you won't spoof that crowd again with the same dodge, you know!"

"I think I may do so. Is there a hose-pipe available?"

"Yes," said Reddy, staring.

He began to find Goggs almost too succinct.

"Would there be any particular difficulty in training it upon one of the windows at the back?"

"Shouldn't think so. Why?"

"Then will you ask your friends, Owen and Lawrence, to help you do so? By the way, I do not know your name?"

"Oh, I'm Redfern! I say——"

"And the flannels you spoke of—could you let me have them at once?"

"Oh, yes; but——"

"Let us defer explanations, Redfern!"

"That's all right. For succinctness you just fairly take the bun, Goggs, old scout! Anything else?"

"Yes. If you would point out to me the study in which——"

"That's it!"

"Will you tap at it? Please do not linger after tapping. And do not forget the flannels!"

Reddy tapped. Clampe's voice called:

"Who's there?"

Reddy admits that it gave him quite a shock when Ratty spoke from close to him, as it seemed. Only it wasn't Ratty, of course; it was Goggs.

"Clampe! You wicked, unprincipled boy! But you shall rue your conduct! Proceed at once, you and those with you—Scrope, Racke, Mellish, and Crooke; oh, I know you all!—to the empty box-room, and release the victim of your foul spite! You little thought that your nefarious proceedings had a witness, and that my return earlier than you expected me would not only lead to my hearing of your crime, but to my witnessing with my own eyes—— Oh, you diabolical young scoundrels! The resources of language are not equal to full and adequate expression of my opinion of your conduct!"

But Reddy says he thinks Goggs' lingual resources didn't do so very badly, all things considered. In fact, he considered Ratty might have done worse.

Perhaps Goggs had not exactly got Ratty's vocabulary, but at a time like that Racke & Co. were not likely to be too critical.

You can picture them gazing at one another with drawn and frightened faces. They never suspected the truth. One might think they would have done, but it is very certain they didn't.

There was a pause before the door opened. Perhaps the five took counsel during that pause. I don't know. But Mellish has admitted that they thought it meant the order of the boot for them all.

Goggs was a visitor, you see, and our Head believes in hospitality. And it would have been quite impossible for them to explain why they were up against Goggs.

At last the door opened, and Clampe's face appeared.

Reddy had stayed. He knew he could find Owen and Lawrence at once, for they were in their study close by. And he would not have missed the sight of those rotters' dials for a term's pocket-money, he says—not even a term of Racke's pocket-money, on which income tax ought to be paid.

"My hat! You chaps are in for it hot and strong!" he said.

They looked round wildly.

"Where is the old beast?" asked Scrope.

"How dare you?" thundered Ratty's voice.

Reddy pointed down the stairs. That was where Goggs was—just round the corner, on the landing.

The five bolted. They wanted to get Goggs inside before Ratty appeared.

Goggs went after them like a flash. He had slipped off his spiked cricket-boots, and his feet made no noise. They never looked round.

The key grated in the lock as the nervous, shaking hand of Crooke turned it. They rushed inside.

The door slammed to. The key turned again. But this time it did not grate, for there was no shakiness about the hand of Johnny Goggs!

"Why, he's—— Oh, hang it!" howled Racke. "Crooke, you fool——"

"Fool yourself! It was your rotten dodge! Dashed if we're not locked in!"

Now the reproachful face of Goggs flashed a moment upon Reddy, and Reddy realised the need of haste. He gave a wild yell to Owen and Lawrence, and they tumbled out.

Downstairs they rushed, and got out the hose. Reddy says his head was in a whirl, but for a chap in that state he did not do so badly. There was no more time wasted.

There were five faces at the window when the water was turned on. It hit them full and fairly, with an awful swish and splash.

And then there were not five faces, for the rotters beat a hasty retreat.

"Yarooooogh!" howled Clampe. "Stopp'k, you cads!"

The room was a small one, and the window wide open. Lawrence, and Owen, with Reddy's one-handed help, played the stream right into it, and the gallant five scrambled and struggled, and barged one another like madmen, in their efforts to get into the very small part of it that offered shelter from the storm.

"Get out of my way, Crooke, you clumsy idiot!"

"Ow-yow! Take your foot out of my stomach, Scrope!"

"Gerrup, Mellish, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Is that how you like it done?" yelled Reddy.

"Wait till I get at you, that's all!" raved Racke.

"Oh, we'll wait!" shouted Lawrence.

"Rather! Come down, now, if you're in a hurry, though!" added Owen.

They couldn't come down. They dared not try it. Not one of them would have had the pluck to shin down that pipe, even without the hose playing upon them.

And I don't believe that even yet they were sure that it was not Batty who had called them out of Clampe's study.

They were having no end of a gay time together. It was like a giddy cat-fight, Reddy said.

Racke is a particularly unpleasant specimen when he gets his wool off. He has lots more oof than the rest, you see, and he seems to feel that that gives him a kind of semi-royal position among them.

But they got democratic after a few minutes of his raging and tearing around and trying to make of them a shelter for him against the stream from the hose.

Mellish said afterwards that Crooke plugged Racke in the eye, and he himself hit Racke on the nose, and Clampe and Scrope also did things to Racke. All of which sounds like four to one against Racke. I don't say they wouldn't; but Mellish is a bit of a Prussian at best.

Reddy and Owen and Lawrence did not bother about what they were doing inside. They just kept the hose going nicely.

But now the mild and spectacled face of Goggs appeared at another window.

"Redfern," said Goggs, in accents of deep reproach, "you have forgotten those flannels!"

(To be concluded next week.)

BAGGING BAGGY.

By ERNEST LEVISON.

"IT'S not fair!" growled Baggy Trimble.

"What isn't fair, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

"You're not."

"What!"

"You don't play the game!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs, and Baggy Trimble dodged behind Tom Merry.

"Yah! Keep him off!" he roared.

"Pway step out of the way, Tom Mewwy! I am goin' to give Twimble a feahful thwashin'!"

Tom Merry grinned, and stepped out of the way. But Trimble kept behind him, and dodged D'Arcy round the captain of the Shell.

"But what's the matter?" asked Cardew. "Let's hear Baggy's complaint!"

"Wats!"

"Tain't playing the game!" gasped the fat Fourth-Former. "Look at us, with our sugar cut down to half a pound a week, and D'Arcy——"

"I don't consume any sugah at all, you fat wascal!"

"No, because you can afford saccharine!" snorted Trimble. "I don't call it playing the game. If you claimed your allowance, and handed it over to a fellow who'd like it—me, f'instance—that would be all right; but——"

"You uttah ass! My object in goin' without sugah is to save it, not to fatten up a pwize porkah!"

"Well, I consider——"

"Are you comin' out fwom behind Tom Mewwy, Twimble?"

"No, I'm not!" said Trimble promptly.

"Oh, wats!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away with his nose in the air.

Baggy Trimble looked round for support.

"You see, you fellows——" he began.

But before he could get any further Tom Merry took him by the collar, and sat him on the ground, so Baggy had to ring off.

There wasn't any sympathy for Baggy.

All the fellows thought it was nobby of Gussy to give up sugar, and spend a big part of his pocket-money on an expensive substitute. Saccharine costs a lot of money, and it's not so nice as sugar; but it will do at a pinch, and Gussy always used it and paid for it himself. So that saved half a pound of sugar every week; and every little helps when you are blockaded by Huns.

Now that Baggy Trimble had spotted it, though, it looked as if Arthur Augustus would have to look after his saccharine tablets.

That same evening Blake caught Baggy rooting about in Study No. 6, and helped him out into the passage with his boot.

The next day Herries found him lurking near the study, and booted him the length of the passage.

And after that Digby caught him chewing chunks of saccharine in the quad, and he didn't need to ask where Baggy had got them; so he ducked Baggy's head in the fountain.

That evening there wasn't any saccharine for tea in Study No. 6.

The study was beginning to get exasperated with Trimble. He fairly haunted the place, like a lion seeking what he might devour.

On Saturday afternoon there was a House match, and all the four fellows of Study No. 6 were in Tom Merry's eleven against the New House.

That was Baggy's great opportunity.

After making sure that the coast was clear, Baggy Trimble tiptoed to Study No. 6 to look for the bottle of saccharine tablets.

"My hat!" he ejaculated, as he blinked into the study.

There it was, under his nose!

As a rule, the chums of No. 6 were careful with that bottle, on account of Baggy's raids, and Trimble had expected it to be locked up. He had been wondering how to deal with the cupboard lock.

This was a stroke of luck. It seemed that D'Arcy & Co., thinking about the match, had left the saccharine on the table, and forgotten all about it.

Baggy made one clutch at the bottle, and bolted from the study.

"Hallo! What have you got there?" asked Cardew, meeting him in the passage.

"Nothing!" stammered Baggy.

"Is that D'Arcy's saccharine?"

"Nothing of the sort! Go and eat coke!"

And Baggy bolted with his prize.

He went into his study, where Mellish was getting tea, and grumbling about having no sugar.

"Got it?" asked Mellish.

Baggy grinned, and held up the bottle.

"Good egg! We'll have our tea sweet for once!" grinned Mellish.

They made their tea, and put in plenty of saccharine to sweeten it.

Baggy tasted the tea, and sniffed.

"Blessed if that seems to sweeten it!" he said. "It doesn't seem to taste at all!"

"But it ought to be supposed to be as good as a lump of sugar," said Mellish thoughtfully. "I've put in four, and it don't make any difference. Try some more!"

They fairly loaded the little white tablets into their tea, and drank it; but it was rather a frost.

The tea didn't seem very sweet.

"Blessed if I can see what D'Arcy sees in that muck!" said Mellish, when he had drunk his cup. "It hardly makes any difference to the tea!"

"It's supposed to be awfully sweetening!" said Baggy, puzzled. "I can't make it out!"

"Well, it's rubbish!"

Trimble had to agree that it was rubbish. It didn't make the tea much nicer, anyway.

It was a couple of hours later when the fellows came in from cricket.

As they passed the door of No. 2 Study, on their way to No. 6, Blake & Co. heard a sound of groaning within.

"Bai Jove! That sounds like somebody ill!" said Arthur Augustus.

Blake chuckled.

"Only Baggy Trimble," he said.

"Bettah give him a look in, deah boy."

Blake opened the door.

Baggy Trimble and Mellish were there. Baggy was stretched in the armchair, with his hands pressed on his fat waist, groaning dismally. Mellish was on the hearthrug, fairly doubled up, and as white as a sheet, and mumbling.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah?" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Groo-hooh-hooh!"

"Are you ill, deah boys?"

"Yow-ow!"

"Yowp!"

"Been eating or drinking something that doesn't agree with you?" asked Jack Blake.

"Oh, dear! I'm dying!" moaned Baggy.

"I—I've been poisoned!" said Mellish faintly. "It—it must have been the saccharine! Oh, dear!"

"Bai Jove! Have you feahful wottahs been waidin' my sacchawine?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"They couldn't get it out of the cupboard," said Herries. "It's locked!"

"Yow-ow!" groaned Trimble. "Oh, dear! These fearful pains! I—I'm full of red-hot daggers! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! There's nothin' to laugh at, Blake, if the poor chaps are weally ill!" said Arthur Augustus.

"It w s the saccharine!" groaned Trimble "What did you leave it on your table for, you silly beasts! Ow, ow, ow!"

"But we did not leave it on the table, Twimble; it was locked up in the cupboard!"

"Did you help yourself to that bottle on the table?" yelled Blake.

"Yow-ow! Yes! Call a doctor!"

"And you thought it was saccharine?" Trimble sat up.

"Wasn't it saccharine?" he yelled.

Blake gurgled.

"Not at all. It was an old saccharine bottle with the label on. But what was in it wasn't saccharine!"

"Oh, crikey! Wha-a-at was it?"

"B ckache pills," said Blake cheerfully "If you've got the backache, you take one. If you take more than one or two, you're liable to have a pain in the tummy!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Bai Jove! What a vewy extwaordinawy twick, Blake!"

"I thought some sneaking rotter might come raiding the saccharine," grinned Blake, "so I planted the bottle all ready!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How many have you taken, Trimble?"

"Yow-ow! Seven or eight!"

"Oh, crumbs! How many have you Mellish?"

"Nine or ten!" shricked Mellish. "Oh dear!"

"Great Scott! Well, if you're subject to backache, that'll cure it dead," said Blake. "But you'll have trouble inside for about twelve hours at least, I should say!"

"Twelve hours!" screamed Trimble.

"Well, perhaps fourteen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Help!"

Blake & Co. went in to tea. They found their saccharine safe and sound in the study cupboard. As for the backache pills, which looked remarkably like saccharine tablets, Trimble and Mellish were welcome to them. They had cost ninepence the lot, but Blake considered it worth ninepence.

When Mellish and Trimble turned up in the dorm that night they were white and worn, and still moaning. And after that Baggy Trimble never haunted Study No. 6 again in search of saccharine. He was fed-up with saccharine.

THE END